NOVEMBER 2016 VOLUME 26 ISSUE 11

BFI

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight&Sound

BLACK BRITISH STARDOM SPECIAL

DAVID OYELOWO

PLUS

- FROM EARL CAMERON TO SOPHIE OKONEDO AND JOHN BOYEGA: THE BLACK BRITISH ACTOR
- FRENCH FILM NOIR
- ROBERT ALDRICH IN THE 1970S
- KEN LOACH ON 'I, DANIEL BLAKE'

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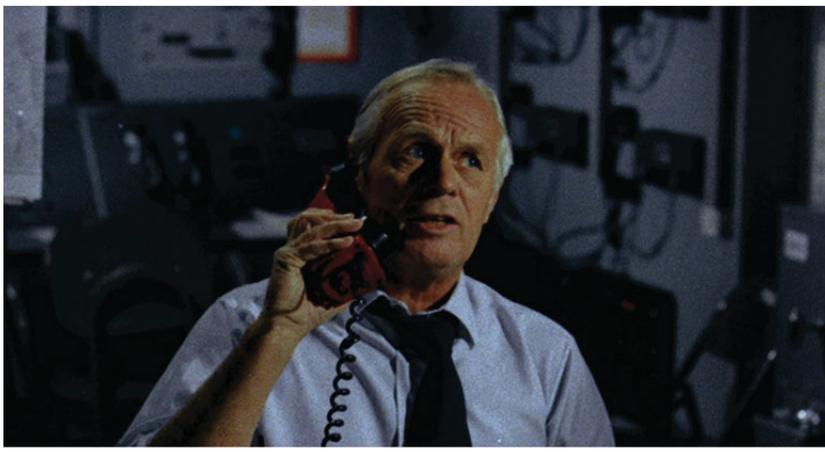
TWILIGHT'S LAST GLEAMING



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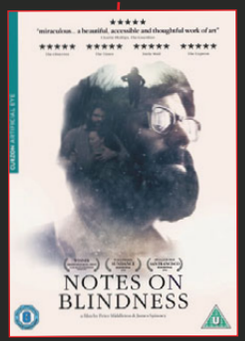

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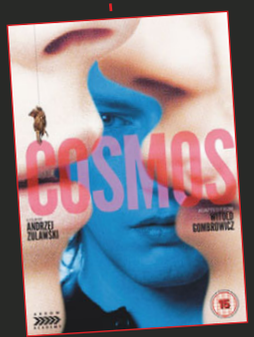

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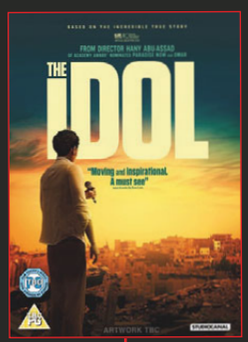

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Sight&Sound

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE BFI

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t: twitter.com/SightSoundmag

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Volume 26 Issue 11 (NS)
ISSN 0037-4806 USPS 496-040

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David Oyelowo photographed by Richard Saker/Contour by Getty Images. Retouched by DawkinsColour

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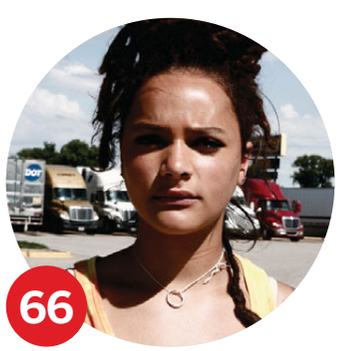


And online this month LFF blog and podcasts | Deborah Stratman | a video essay on Jacques Becker's French crime dramas | Veit Harlan | movie witches and more bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

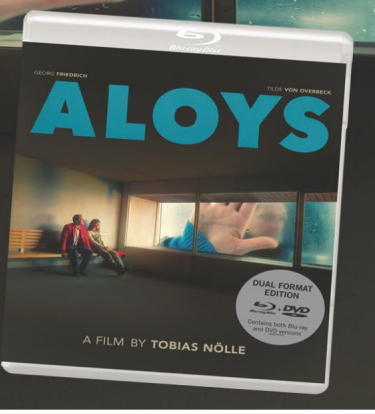
GEORG FRIEDRICH

TILDE VON OVERBECK

ALOYS

A FILM BY TOBIAS NÖLLE

Highly accalimed at festival screenings, with comparisons being made to filmmaker Michel Gondry and writer Charlie Kaufman, ***Aloys*** is director Tobias Nölle's first feature, available in a **Dual Format (DVD and Blu-ray) edition this October.**



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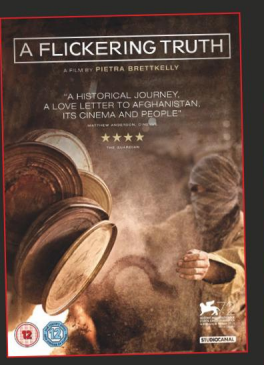

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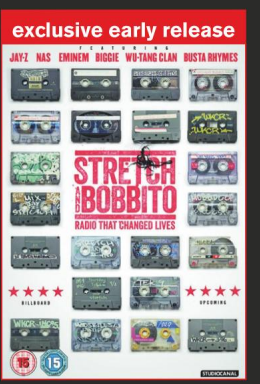

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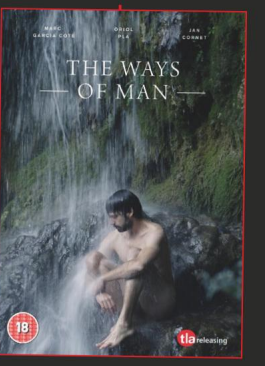

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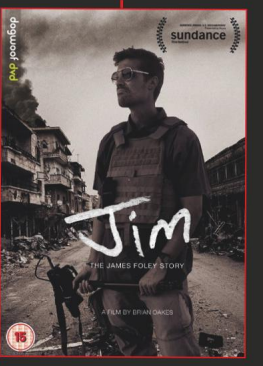
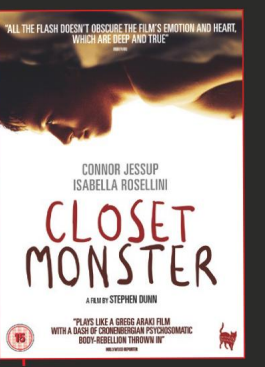


bizarre released 10/10/16



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Sight & Sound (ISSN 0037-4806) is published monthly by British Film Institute, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN and distributed in the USA by Mail Right Int., 1637 Stelton Road B2, Piscataway, NJ 08854
Periodicals Postage Paid at Piscataway, NJ and additional mailing offices
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sight and Sound c/o Mail Right International Inc. 1637 Stelton Road B2, Piscataway NJ 08854

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Annual subscription rates:
UK £45, Eire and ROW £68
£10 discount for BFI members

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The BFI is a charity, (registration number 287780), registered at 21 Stephen St, London, W1T 1LN

Editorial Nick James

THE GIRL ON THE BRAIN

Recently I attended the premiere of *The Girl on the Train* in London. As you sit in the cinema waiting at such events, you get to watch the screen showing the stars doing their thing on the red carpet outside. Here, rather than a red carpet, there were *trompe l'oeil* railway tracks and a tiny fake station platform for the photo calls. But what fascinated me was watching Emily Blunt in close-up as she went to meet the line of fans.

Blunt behaved like the consummate professional adult she is. She never seemed condescending, did fan-with-star selfie after selfie, and would respond to the request, "Can I have a hug?" with, "Of course." All in all, she came across as a diplomatic, conscientious 33-year-old doing her job. Why then is she playing a character called *The Girl on the Train* rather than *The Woman on the Train*?

It's an obvious feminist point but the prevalence of the word 'girl' in hugely popular film, TV and literary fictions over the last few years has been so marked as to present a new twist on the selling and receiving of ideas of femininity. (If you think this is a minor matter, check out 'The book title with 91 imitators' on Vulture.com – and that was published almost three years ago).

The current run began with Stieg Larsson's thriller *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, published in English in 2008. The original Swedish title was *Men Who Hate Women* – you can see the marketing dilemma for a potential blockbuster right there. One version of the story has it that Larsson created the character Lisbeth Salander partly in recompense to a friend he had seen gang-raped and had not tried to intervene. Salander is a rape victim who gets to enact her revenge. She's also a leather-clad goth fantasy figure of considerable iconic power.

The 'girl' films and books tend to argue that they've brought more agency to women in the violent thriller genre where they are usually victims. But do the most prominent examples bear that out? (SPOILER ALERT) In Gillian Flynn's novel *Gone Girl* (and David Fincher's film version), Amy Dunne disappears from her married home after, it seems, being violently attacked. This turns out to be a ruse designed to finger her husband as a murderer in revenge for him having an affair. She also enacts bloody revenge on an old boyfriend who tries to imprison her. In Paula Hawkins's novel and the film of *The Girl on the Train*, three women are manipulated, abused and/or assaulted by someone who "couldn't keep his dick in his pants" – and remain relatively passive until violent action beckons as necessary at last.

Sarah Smyth argues on the *Bitch Flicks* website that such 'girls' are examples of the 'final girl' – the key concept of Carol Clover in her book *Men, Women and Chain Saws* – which Smyth summarises as "the site of the audience's sadistic fantasies, and the anchor for spectator identification. Primarily aimed at young heterosexual men, the final girl must be 'masculine' enough so that this (assumed) spectator can identify with her; she is often androgynous or tomboyish... must be sexualized but never sexual... never have autonomy over her own body and sexuality." For Smyth, "Whether these psychological thrillers are aimed at or primarily watched by men or women is almost beside the point."

Emily Blunt came across as a diplomatic, conscientious 33-year-old doing her job. Why then is she playing a character called 'The Girl on the Train' rather than 'The Woman on the Train'?

But is it? Surely it's more complicated than that. The question why these fictions are now hungrily consumed by a largely female audience is crucial and can't be fully investigated here. But there may be clues in Zoë Heller's review in the *New York Review of Books* of such recent studies as Nancy Jo Sales's *American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Lives of Teenagers* and Peggy Orenstein's *Girls & Sex: Navigating the Complicated New Landscape*. A typical extract argues: "The most significant influence on young women's lives is the coarse, sexist and 'hypersexualised' culture of social media... Girls who spend long enough in this competitive beauty pageant atmosphere don't need to be coerced into serving themselves up as masturbatory fantasies." A recent front-page story in the *Guardian* headlined 'Mental illness soars in young women' also blames sexual violence, childhood trauma and pressures from social media for a rise in self-harming and PTSD.

The states of mind of Lisbeth, Amy and Blunt's Rachel are all on edge or at risk. Rachel, in particular, is a portrait of someone driven almost crazy by thwarted expectations. Could it be that it's the recognition of what the pressures described above can do to your sense of self that female audiences respond to in these fictions?

The question of who has the power over a woman's mind and body is at the heart also of the final film I want to mention. It has Isabelle Huppert – definitely not 'a girl' or a victim – who finds her own way of getting back at her rapist and it brilliantly exposes the issues discussed here in a new light. The film is called *Elle*.

ILLUSTRATION BY SIMON COOPER AT WWW.COOPERILLO.COM

IN THE FRAME

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

A season of trash, schlock and sleaze classics from the past 90-odd years delights in bad taste and glories in sexual transgression

By Michael Brooke

There's something wonderfully subversive about a respected arts institution screening films that were originally intended for the sleaziest grindhouse, and the Barbican's upcoming season 'Cheap Thrills: Trash, Movies and the Art of Transgression' is no exception – although its definition of 'cheap thrills' turns out to be gratifyingly wide. For every convict drama like *Terminal Island* (1973) or Hong Kong martial arts-black magic shocker like *The Boxer's Omen* (1983) there's a Douglas Sirk melodrama (*Magnificent Obsession*, 1954), a Czechoslovak silent (1929's *Erotikon*, whose thrills are more suggestive than cheap) and a rare 35mm outing for Richard Kelly's sophomore effort *Southland Tales* (2005). All of this is interspersed with films familiar from arthouse rep double bills – Herzog's *Even Dwarfs Started Small* (1970), Fassbinder's *Fox and His Friends* (1975). Meanwhile, Paul Thomas Anderson's 1997 *Boogie Nights* stands in for a crammed raft of 1970s American porn titles that remain legally iffy as far as UK cinemas are concerned, even though their participants have reached pensionable age and the originals are easily obtainable via Blu-ray and DVD imports or a subscription to Vinegar Syndrome's gloriously *outré* Exploitation.tv streaming video service.

Unsurprisingly, the transgressions in the vast majority of cases are sexual, although for once gay themes are less central than melodramas featuring strong central female roles. One wouldn't have thought that Henry King's 1925 version of *Stella Dallas* would have much in common with John Waters's lip-smackingly tasteless *Female Trouble* (1974) – for starters, Stella isn't played by a 300-pound transvestite – but the themes of social ostracism and abandonment

Three's company: Elizabeth Taylor and Michael Caine in Brian Hutton's *X, Y and Zee* (1971)

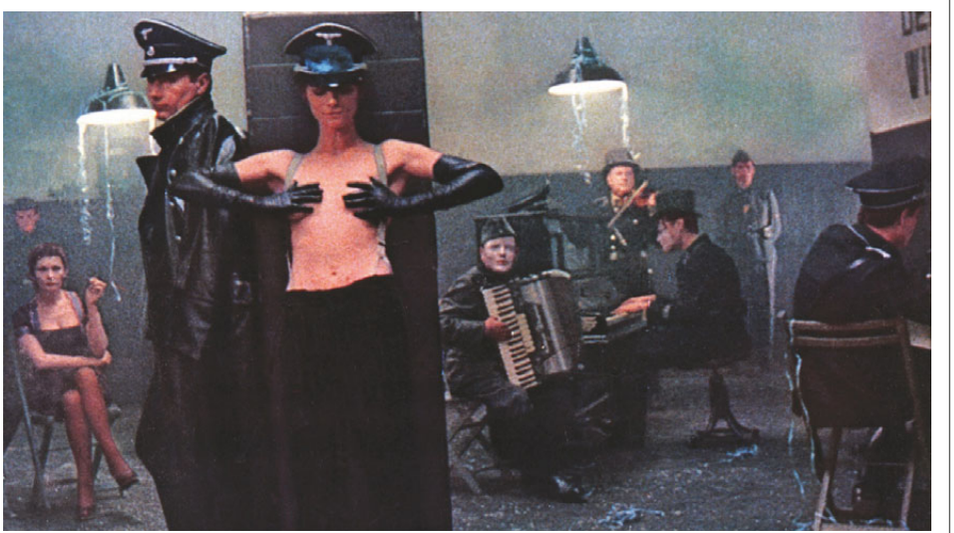
ON OUR RADAR

Blue Velvet

It's been 30 years since the release of David Lynch's neo-noir hallucination (right), and on 2 December it returns to cinemas across the UK. Don't miss the chance to see Dennis Hopper, Isabella Rossellini, Kyle MacLachlan and Laura Dern on the big screen in Lynch's sordid suburban underworld. In dreams...

William Kentridge: Thick Time

For the last three decades the South African artist has been tackling sober subjects such as apartheid and totalitarianism in his lyrical charcoal, pencil and live-action animations. New and recent films and installations, including the Georges Méliès-inspired 'The Refusal of Time' (right) are showing at London's Whitechapel Gallery (until 15 January), and in 2018 will tour to the Whitworth in Manchester.



Love is the devil: Charlotte Rampling in *The Night Porter* (1973)

are surprisingly comparable at base. Similarly, the near-contemporary *Fuego* (1969) and *X, Y and Zee* (aka *Zee and Co*, 1971) both revolve around assertive women very much in control of their own social and sexual desires – as is also the case with *The Night Porter* (1973), even though Charlotte Rampling's concentration camp survivor is notionally the 'victim' in her S&M relationship with Dirk Bogarde's former Nazi torturer. And although *Dolemite* (1975, screening with a respect-bestowing Isaac Julien introduction) is named after its pimp protagonist (the incomparable Rudy Ray Moore), he's accompanied by a band of female prostitutes who conveniently happen to be kung fu experts.

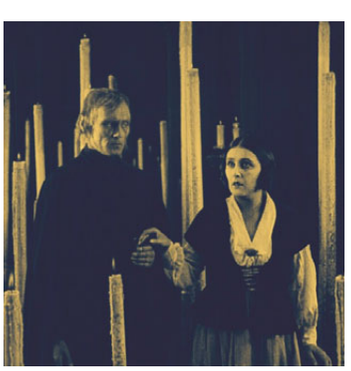
Although hailing from very different milieux (European arthouse, US blaxploitation), these last two titles also highlight another eternally compelling quality of films proffering 'cheap thrills' – their gleefully deliberate bad taste, something that Fassbinder and Waters also cheerfully exploited across a similar cultural and geographical divide. This was particularly prevalent in the early to mid-1970s, as artists and hucksters alike sought to capitalise on the freedoms ushered in by the upheavals of the previous few years. Some notions of 'bad taste' were later absorbed into the mainstream – much of Waters's early work looks, if not exactly tame, at least on a broadly similar level of tastelessness to BBC-backed sitcoms such as *Nighty Night* and *Fleabag* (both unimaginable as television entertainment 40 years ago); but some taboos not only remain in place but have even been strengthened. Once, outrage against perceived challenges to societal and sexual norms was generally expressed by conservative activists such as the late Mary Whitehouse; these days it's as likely to come in the form of a social media mob comprising people who in most other contexts would consider themselves politically liberal.

That very theme is the topic of a panel discussion, 'What Happened to Bad Taste?', on Friday 28 October, and the following day sees critic Virginie Sélavy paying tribute to Roberta Findlay, Barbara Peeters, Stephanie Rothman and Doris Wishman, practically the only women working in 1970s American exploitation cinema. And Catherine Breillat, who has been confronting assorted taboos since the 1970s, is on hand later on the Saturday to talk about her *Fat Girl* (2001), which notoriously challenged clichés about the innocence of 13-year-old girls. Once upon a time, cinemas like London's much-missed Scala (just two tube stops from the Barbican) offered fare like this on a weekly basis, until its programming was challenged by the far more extensive catalogues offered by video distributors. But watching these films at home doesn't come anywhere close to the same experience: sharing what may be intensely private pleasures with a roomful of complete strangers is one of the cheapest and yet most potent of cinematic thrills. S

'Cheap Thrills: Trash, Movies and the Art of Transgression' runs at the Barbican, London, from 28 October – 6 November

Cambridge Film Festival

The festival (20-27 October) is awash with exciting contemporary cinema – including debut features from Lorenzo Vigas ('From Afar') and Esther May Campbell ('Light Years'), but two repertory selections stand out: a programme of Ingrid Bergman's early films, and a restoration of Fritz Lang's 'Destiny' (1921, right) – a favourite of Hitchcock and Buñuel – which Eureka/Masters of Cinema will release on DVD and Blu-ray in 2017.



Africa in Motion

African films rarely get big-screen releases in the UK, which makes this festival (28 October – 8 November) so important in showcasing new work from the continent in cinemas across Edinburgh and Glasgow. Highlights include Rahmatou Keïta's Niger-set 'The Wedding Ring' (right); 'Naked Reality', a science fiction film from Cameroon's Jean-Pierre Bekolo; and Egyptian director Tamar El Said's 'In the Last Days of the City'.

HANG 'EM HIGH

The film posters seen adorning the walls in movies offer a chance for directors to pay tribute to their heroes – and to themselves

By Hannah McGill

If you're reading this, there's a fair chance you've got a movie poster or two in your home. I have a few myself: *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) and *Lift to the Scaffold* (1958) in the front room; *The Cranes are Flying* (1957) in the kitchen. Why did I buy and frame and hang those posters? A simple matter of fandom? A simpler matter of interior design? Nostalgia for somewhere or someone I was when I saw those films? Something in their spirit or atmosphere or message of which I want to be reminded? Or my desire to project certain ideas about myself to visitors to my home? All of the above reasons apply, of course – as they do when the director of a film places a poster for another movie prominently in the frame.

Most obviously, a poster glimpsed in the background will credit an influence, or indicate the company the director wishes his or her own work to keep. Pulp posters on the diner walls in *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Death Proof* (2007) celebrate Quentin Tarantino's tastes and the films' genre trappings. A poster for Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) seen in Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible* (2002) points to the latter film's expansive philosophical aspirations. And unabashed nostalgia for cinema's golden age informs the placement of the posters for Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* (1942) in Giuseppe Tornatore's *Cinema Paradiso* (1988), and John Huston's *Across the Pacific* (1942) in Woody Allen's *Play It Again, Sam* (1972).

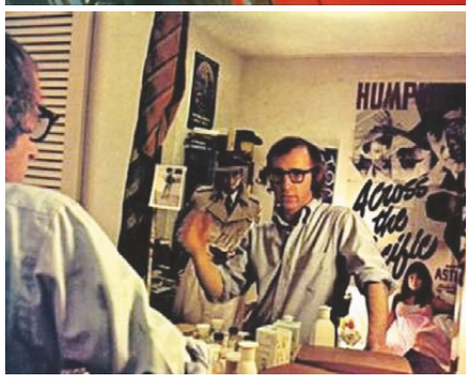
Filmmakers also pay tribute to their own back catalogues this way. Fritz Lang lets posters for *Metropolis* (1927) be seen in a street scene in *Spione* (1928); Jean-Luc Godard features posters for his own films in *Le Mépris* (1963) and *Pierrot le Fou* (1965). More playful still is the fictional poster: John Landis includes in repeated movies publicity materials for different genre interpretations of the title 'See You Next Wednesday'.

A movie poster can also be a means to hint at a coming plot point or a hidden character motivation. The onslaught of porn and horror posters covering the walls of the film production offices in *Blow Out* (1981) suggest the unpleasantness to come. When Griffin (Tim Robbins) is placed between posters for *Prison Break* (1938) and *Murder in the Big House* (1942) in Robert Altman's *The Player* (1992), it's an indication that he's trapped by the consequences of his own actions. A poster for Charles Vidor's *Gilda* (1946) that catches the eye of the amnesiac Camilla in David Lynch's *Mulholland Dr.* (2001) provides her with a name, Rita – and the audience with a reminder that a love object may not be who they say they are.

Rita Hayworth as Gilda also shows up in Frank Darabont's *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), on one of the succession of posters used to conceal a prisoner's escape channel. Marilyn Monroe in Billy Wilder's *The Seven Year Itch* (1955) succeeds her, then Raquel Welch in *One Million Years B.C.* (1966); the pin-up girls represent the passage of time, and the pleasures of the flesh denied to the men inside. More obscure, perhaps, is the meaning Pedro Almodóvar wished to convey by featuring the poster for *Winter's Bone* (2010) in his recent *Julieta*, although one might infer a declaration of kinship with another film with a literary source about a woman striving for control of her destiny, and gestures of support towards a female director and movie-carrying actress.

Such fleeting references are always a means to flatter a knowing audience, letting them feel clever by pointing them out. They can, however, also lay filmmakers wide open to the critical attention of the geekier-than-thou. When the makers of the Netflix TV series *Stranger Things* had movie posters for *Jaws* (1975), *The Evil Dead* (1981) and *The Thing* (1982) prominently positioned on their characters' bedroom walls, they were throwing a few extra eggs into the referential pudding for anyone who'd somehow failed to notice the show's front-and-centre 80s influences. They were even referencing the act of referencing: films within *Stranger Things*' own gene pool – *Poltergeist* (1982), *Gremlins* (1984) and *The Evil Dead* itself – have their own movie poster moments. However, they were also providing irresistible bait for those who get off on identifying anachronisms. I quote an admirably thorough Facebook friend (hi, Mik): "Only 15 cinemas played *The Evil Dead* during its North American theatrical release. It was released unrated – restricting what cinemas it was likely to play in. A tiny one-screen theatre in middle America is pretty much the least likely place it might play. So, all things considered, a kid in 1983 Indiana having a mint condition one-sheet for it in their room is the show's greatest implausibility." Wait, there's more: "Also, neither it nor the *The Thing* poster are folded. All US one-sheets from that era would have folds."

So there. Then again, however specific you might think you're being, you're never really in control of what a poster might communicate, particularly to audience members who haven't seen the film you're name-checking. One of my daughters has made up her own mind what my *Lift to the Scaffold* poster means: looking at the image of Maurice Ronet poking his scrawny arms pleadingly through the gap between elevator and floor, she applied the sensible priorities of a two-year-old and declared, "That man is wanting his dinner."



Wall to wall: (clockwise from top left) *Le Mépris*, *The Player*, *Spione* and *Play It Again, Sam*

The *Gilda* poster glimpsed in *Mulholland Dr.* (2001)

Lang lets posters for 'Metropolis' be seen in 'Spione'; Godard features posters for his own films in 'Le Mépris' and 'Pierrot le Fou'

INTERVIEW

GREASE IS THE WORD

Jim Hosking's twisted tale of disco dancing and murder in LA, *The Greasy Strangler*, is undeniably unpleasant, but also rather sweet

By Catherine Bray

British director Jim Hosking, working from a script he wrote with his friend Toby Harvard, has created something utterly singular with his low-budget debut *The Greasy Strangler*. Despite the hint in its title, it resists categorisation as a horror movie, and although very funny, can't quite be said to be a comedy in the usual sense either. At heart, it's rather a sweet film, with immense reserves of compassion for its small band of grotesques, as they disco-dance, car-wash and strangle their way to some kind of elusive fulfilment.

Catherine Bray: Big Ronnie. Big Brayden. Ricky Prickles. The names in *The Greasy Strangler* are great – tell us about them.

Jim Hosking: Toby and I play a game called 'trumpage' where we try to trump each other with the best name for a character. I can then picture the characters to a degree. I might think a character is hunched, or seedy, or wide-faced, or sad and loping. Ricky Prickles was supposed to have rock-hard abs and be a big bully, and at first I imagined a tanned, slightly overweight man holding his gut and wearing turquoise swimming trunks and army boots. But in the end he was a short, bandy-legged, bald Lebanese man with a big tummy, a wig, and covered in thick, thick hair. I suppose when you are creating a character called Ricky Prickles you have a little more latitude.

CB: Did the casting calls specify how wild the film would be?

JH: I specified that I wanted unknowns. I wanted endearing, sweet, childlike characters. I wanted to avoid dark, disturbing characters. I wanted to make a film that was innocent in its twisted perversion. I think, though, that it seemed more disturbing on paper than I intended it to be. I still find it rather sweet. I definitely think it could have gone wilder. But then the film might not actually have made it into the cinema. A wild, wild film that nobody ever sees.

CB: What references, if any, did you give the cast and crew?

JH: I put together a kind of salivation-inducing mood board, a smorgasbord of Readers' Wives photos, Charles Bukowski in a hot tub, old pervy cartoons, cheap American breakfasts, images from a few Criterion Collection films to keep it arty mate, because we all like sad, serious films, and then a few pictures of greasy stranglers. The greasy stranglers are basically men covered in porridge with arms outstretched as they attempt to 'feel their way to their destination', and the destination is usually someone's throat.

CB: There's something weirdly childlike about a lot of the phrasing in the dialogue.

JH: We absolutely love that mixture of innocence and perversion, self-importance and depravity, filth and fun. The main point of writing this script was to make each other laugh a lot. The more specific it feels, the funnier it seems. I read something recently about good comedy needing to be like an inside joke. And that's true. It's personal. I have no idea what makes other people laugh. But I have a very strong instinct for what I find funny. And I want to make people laugh in ways that wouldn't quite exist if I wasn't involved in the making of them. Otherwise why have me do it? Get someone else to do it. Get Tony Slattery to do it. No, don't do that.

CB: Was there anything you wanted to achieve with the film that wasn't possible?

JH: I wanted the Greasy Stranglers to be genuinely nude and covered in grease. This wasn't possible for a number of reasons. Obviously hygiene was considered. I also wanted Big Ronnie to hook his legs behind his shoulders when he farts at Brayden. But I think that's only really possible if you are one of those t'ai chi wind masters.

CB: Tell us about the prosthetics.

JH: The Greasy Stranglers needed to look like they had triangular vanilla-scented traffic cones dangling between their legs. Martin Astles at Illusion Industries really got stuck in to making the penises. I've never seen a bearded man in a beanie lay into fake-penis clay with such abandon. Together we came up with the now patented 'Big Ronnie Massive Mouse Head'. We only had about six of these, so every morning we would have a meeting to decide further strategic deployment of the dongs.

We love the mixture of innocence and perversion, filth and fun. The main point of writing this was to make each other laugh a lot

Jim Hosking on the set of *The Greasy Strangler*

CB: Do you have any particular favourite scenes in the film?

JH: I love the scene when Ronnie dances down the street in the spotlight. We shot it in two takes. I told Michael St Michaels to dance in his own style, to show us moves we have never seen. He then danced with some moves that suggested to me that he has been watching some rather rude videos on his internet.

CB: Do you have a personal interest in grease?

JH: I do like rather buttery toast. I butter toast in the simple, old-fashioned way my mother taught me: huge sporadic fat blobs standing proud amongst other totally barren dry areas. My mum used to pour olive oil into her baths. Maybe that's where it all came from. She'd get the bath towels all oily, and I remember feeling angry with her at the lankness of my hair, believing it to be a direct result of her indulgently long oily baths.

CB: Martin Pavey's sound design is wonderful – did you brief him very closely or just let him play around with ideas?

JH: I talked with Martin initially about ideas and a feel for the film, but I always try to leave the door open for people to do whatever they think is going to be interesting. One idea Martin had was to take hyena noises and to treat them and to use them for the Strangler's noises. They were perhaps more real and darker and less comic than I initially wanted, but they work really effectively. I was wrong and he was right. I've learned a lot.

***The Greasy Strangler* is released in UK cinemas on October 7 and on DVD and Blu-ray on October 10. It was reviewed in last month's issue**

Oil city confidential: Michael St Michaels as Big Ronnie

★★★★★

"Embrace of the Serpent is The Type Of Film We're Always Searching For"

JORDAN HOFFMAN - THE GUARDIAN

★★★★★

"Majestic"

THE LIST

★★★★★

"I was utterly mesmerised, captivated and transported"

MARK KERMODE - THE OBSERVER

★★★★★

"Mesmerizing"

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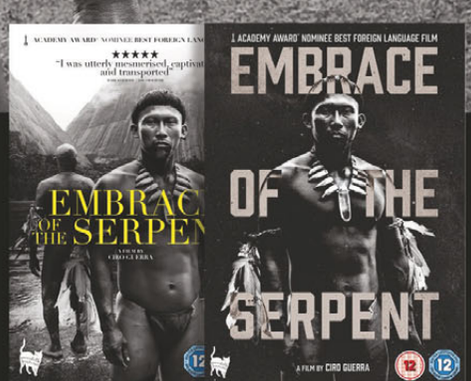


PUMP UP THE VOLUME

Why can rock gigs be very loud, with people bringing ear plugs to reduce the volume according to their preference, but cinema can't?

By Mark Cousins

Recently, for the first time in 15 years, I made something for TV. *Atomic: Living in Dread and Promise*, an archive film collaboration with the band Mogwai, was shown on the BBC to tie in with the 70th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima. I had a great commissioning editor, Nick Fraser of *Storyville*, who allowed us to tell our story in a cinematic way – no presenter, no narration, no telling the audience what was coming up and no summaries – and Mogwai's epic soundscapes were exactly what a film about power, energy and war needed. The film was broadcast, the reaction was great, loads of people saw it and so its anti-nuclear message was duly delivered.

Atomic was then shown at some film festivals and, at each, it sounded too quiet to me. We'd done a thunderous 5.1 sound mix for cinemas, but when I asked projectionists to turn it up, they did a bit but said that audiences don't like films loud. As I wanted the impact in movie theatres to have something of the feel of a bomb exploding, I was disappointed by this, but I've heard people complain about loudness before, and know that autism-friendly screenings with the volume turned down are popular.

Then Mogwai started playing *Atomic* live. They did so in Hiroshima, and I played it *forte* in Chernobyl. And then I heard it live in Amsterdam and Edinburgh. It was *seeing* it for the first time. The sound made the picture bigger. In Edinburgh, in a 2,800-seat theatre, I was near the back, so far from the speakers, but the sound was so powerful that its waves made the fine material of my T-shirt visibly shudder. I was reminded of seeing gigs in my teens, of the pleasure of sonic excess, of its sense of wildness, of 100-mile-an-hour wind, of my fear at hearing bomb blasts in Belfast and Sarajevo. Form and content were in roaring unison in those *Atomic* gigs. The sound expressed our rage at Trident, at those 15,000-plus nuclear warheads which are still on planet earth, at the pessimism of those who feel we need nuclear bombs, at the abyss of Hiroshima, at the trillion dollars spent on nukes. Afterwards, I heard a guy in the toilets say, "I'm in pieces"; outside, people often used the phrase 'blown away' to describe how they felt – both in the language of bombs.

This got me thinking of the different sensory pleasures we have in different places. Churches are hushed, landscapes are vast, gigs are loud, saunas are hot. Over the years, cinema has beckoned us with its various appeals to our senses: from the start it was bigger than life. When TV came along, cinema was wider and more epic than it. In India, the big movie houses had cooling systems. In the 60s and 70s, surround sound and *Star Wars* created a new sonic sublime. 3D brought the screen to our finger tips. The promise was magnitude, expansion or uniqueness. In the digital age, rare 70mm screenings of *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *The Hateful Eight* are hot tickets, promising hypervisuality.

So, I wondered, why can rock gigs be very loud,

Hearing the film loud I was reminded of gigs in my teens, of the pleasure of sonic excess, of its sense of wildness, of 100mph wind

with people bringing ear plugs to reduce the volume according to their preference, but cinema can't? Filmhouse in Edinburgh asked if it could tour *Atomic*, and I asked if there is any legal or technical reason for not playing it at the volume I'd heard it in the dubbing theatre? There is none. TV has a legal limit – mostly to stop damaging the speakers – but good cinema speakers can be cranked up beyond their usual settings. So we've decided to experiment, to treat a film screening like a rock gig, to tour *Atomic* Played LOUD and provide free earplugs. Let's see how it works. People can choose not to come; or come in some trepidation, knowing that they can stuff their ears; or they can come to enjoy sonic overload, that flooding feeling where you get lost in music, caught in a trap, which so many of us love at gigs.

Along with 'big', 'bright', 'wide' and 'deep', can we also add 'loud' to the panoply of the cinematic sublime? Disaster movies of the 70s tried to rumble our seats, and blockbusters today are loud indeed, but their appeal isn't that of an extra loud music score. I'm thinking of films that aren't about car crashes and superhero battles. I'd love a season called Leone LOUD, for example, as the scores in *Once upon a Time in the West* and *Once upon a Time in America* deserve to be heard at full volume, through cinema speakers. And what about *Psycho*? And *Stalker*? And *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*? And *Under the Skin*? Some will baulk at this, but it would be good, sometimes, to challenge cinema sound-level preconceptions. The great Russian director Aleksandr Sokurov wants his films played more *piano* than seems natural, but those who love loud gigs (I'm in the mosh) could challenge that natural, and argue that cinema sound levels could, in pre-advertised screenings, give it laldy. Cinemas can learn from the appeal of other things – churches, children's parties and, yes, the wall of sound of contemporary music.

ILLUSTRATION BY ARTHUR CHIVERTON

DEVELOPMENT TALE

MY SCIENTOLOGY MOVIE

Leap of faith: Louis Theroux outside the Church of Scientology's Pacific Area Command Base in Los Angeles

Louis Theroux on Scientology seems like an obviously great idea – but making a great film without being obvious was a challenge

By Charles Gant

When John Dower was first asked to direct a documentary with Louis Theroux about the Church of Scientology, he turned it down. He'd been approached by producer Simon Chinn, whose credits include *Man on Wire* (2007), *Searching for Sugar Man* (2012) and *The Imposter* (2012). "In retrospect, it just seems ludicrous," says Dower, director of the documentary *Live Forever: The Rise and Fall of Brit Pop* (2003). "Simon, double Oscar-winning producer. Louis, who seems to have become a national institution, bordering on national treasure. But I couldn't get my head round it. First because I'd never worked with a presenter, or someone in front of the camera. Everyone says you do twice the amount of work and you don't get much out of it. Also there was no access."

Dower may also have been concerned by the heavy weather the film was already making. After all, he wouldn't be the first director to board the project.

'Stairway to Heaven', as the film was originally called, came into being after Chinn collided with former school friend Theroux at the 2010 Sheffield Doc/Fest. A couple of lunch meetings followed, and it was at the second, around May 2011, that Chinn proposed a film about Scientology.

"As I was not surprised to hear," Chinn says, "Louis had been fascinated by Scientology for many years, and had tried to make a documentary about the church about ten years previously. And he had sort of given up. Louis had a significant sense of nervousness about embarking on a major film project without any access to his quarry. He is the guy who gets access. He was: 'If I haven't got that, what do I have?'"

In February 2011, the *New Yorker* had published a long article by Lawrence Wright about the church, in which he spoke to prominent defectors, notably the film director Paul Haggis. "Here was an interesting moment in the history of Scientology, which had always been this deeply secretive religion," Chinn says. "What had changed is that there was now a trickle, moving into a little bit of an exodus of Scientologists, who were defecting and blowing the whistle." Chief among these was Marty Rathbun, the former inspector general of the organisation who had also once been the top lieutenant of church leader David Miscavige. Rathbun would emerge as the film's key witness and guiding spirit.

In 2012, Chinn secured development finance from three BBC divisions – BBC Documentaries, BBC Worldwide and BBC Films – and the film's original director (whom Chinn prefers not to name "to spare his blushes") was attached in March 2013.

"We had a bit of a false start," says the producer, speaking from Los Angeles. "This was a director actually in LA. It made sense to do the production out here, and maybe have a director based here. But for one reason and another, it didn't work out. We were quite far down the road with him. It was a fairly unsatisfying process from my point of view." The production parted ways with the director in August that year.

Chinn's company Red Box at the time shared a London office with John Battsek's Passion, for whom Dower had directed several documentary features. "I felt he would bring something unusual and innovative to it," says the producer. "And I thought he would understand how to navigate the challenges of working with Louis, someone who could find ways to get Louis a little bit out of his comfort zone, and in a way that Louis would feel OK about."

With Dower finally persuaded, the director then offered his initial creative idea. "The trailer they had made felt like a Louis TV programme, talking to former church members in their kitchens. I just felt if it was going to be a feature it needed to feel different. I came up with a totally bizarre idea that was a bit like Elliott Gould in Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye*: this guy lost in LA with all these crazy characters. It was too meta. Louis said, 'Can't stand that, it's not me.'

"Through discussions we came up with this very simple idea of castings and performance. Louis had seen *The Act of Killing*, and I love those Iranian films like [Abbas Kiarostami's] *Close-Up* and [Mohsen Makhmalbaf's] *A Moment of Innocence*. It felt motivated by the subject. Here you have a religion that's founded in LA, by a guy, L. Ron Hubbard, who turned his hand to screenwriting, wanted to be a director, set up a movie studio. David Miscavige started as a camera operator in the church's Golden Era studios. The more you delve into Scientology, you realise there's an overlay between some of its drills or

so-called 'tech' and method acting. You're almost training yourself to become a different person."

Chinn was willing to roll the dice on this idea. "The BBC did end up backing the film very well, so I had a bit of a war chest," he says. "I felt I had enough resources to be able to try some shit out. If we fail, it wouldn't be game over for the project."

The production put out a casting call for actors. As Dower explains, "We weren't going to be doing an *Imposter*-style film with very slick, well-crafted re-enactment. First of all, that's just not Louis. These were improvised sessions, just a way of trying to get into the mind-set: what is it like being a Scientologist? And it was partly to give Louis something to do in the present. He can't do retrospective. He can't even really do interviews sitting down, which I discovered. We tried one, bizarrely, with Kenneth Anger, which is a whole different dog-leg of the film that didn't happen."

Chinn continues: "We got very lucky, particularly because we found Andrew Perez – the actor who plays David Miscavige – who I think changed the fortunes of the film. The re-enactments also allowed Louis to develop his relationship with Marty, who becomes

We struggled to get into some of the festivals we wanted because the Gibney film was out there. We had to play a very long game

almost a director of the film-within-the-film. Through that relationship a lot is revealed. It's a very strained, testy relationship at times."

Adds Dower, "It took Marty back to a time and place when he was in the church, and that got the film rolling."

Just as the film was finding its feet, however, word arrived of serious competition. "It was a difficult moment," says Chinn. "OK, Alex Gibney is making a film about Scientology. When is he ever not making a film, frankly, about something you are interested in? He's prolific. But he's got several other projects on the go. Is he going to finish it before we do? There were so many unknowns."

In fact, Gibney's *Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief* premiered at Sundance in January 2015, while *My Scientology Movie*, as the Theroux film was retitled, was still in the cutting room.

Chinn concedes there was a downside: "We struggled to get into some of the festivals we wanted because the Gibney film was out there. We had to play a very long game." *My Scientology Movie* premiered at the BFI London Film Festival in October 2015, but did not confirm major international sales until May 2016.

Now, however, the mood has brightened. Says Chinn, "It's looking like our film will be double the gross of *Going Clear* in Australia. And in the UK, Louis has a huge young fanbase. I think Netflix has given him that. That's why a lot of the screenings are selling out. Our UK distributor Altitude are amazed at the pre-sales. It's going to significantly out-gross the box office of *Going Clear* in this country."

***My Scientology Movie* is released on 7 October and is reviewed on page 83**

THE NUMBERS
HELL OR HIGH WATER

By Charles Gant

In 2014, when David Mackenzie finally achieved his first £1 million UK box-office hit with *Starred Up*, the commercial breakthrough could not have been more timely. The prison drama followed seven Mackenzie features that had only produced one film – *Young Adam* (2003) – that could really be labelled a box-office success. A whole decade's worth of films, more or less creatively achieved but all rather commercially modest, came in its wake.

Now *Starred Up* has been followed by *Hell or High Water*, which has grossed $25 million in the US and overtaken the box office of *Starred Up* in the UK – signalling a new moment for the 50-year-old director. It suggests that *Starred Up* was no fluke. And given the film's setting (West Texas) and genre (modern western), Mackenzie is now demonstrating a directorial facility with a broader range of subjects and material – handy confirmation after the disappointment of his previous US-set film, *Spread* (2010).

His regular producer partner Gillian Berrie – who set up the Glasgow-based Sigma Films with David and his brother, the actor Alastair Mackenzie, back in 1996 – acknowledges that it hasn't always been easy to secure financing for the filmmaker. The support of UK broadcasters with cultural mandates that look beyond the bottom line has been vital, with Film4 backing *Hallam Foe* (2007) and *Starred Up* and BBC Films supporting the box-office duds *Perfect Sense* (2011) and *You Instead*. And as Berrie acknowledges, Sigma has also been consistently helped by Creative Scotland and its predecessor Scottish Screen.

If those entities were all along playing what may be termed the long game, then their patience is paying off. "We are working closely with Film4 and hoping to do something with the BBC," Berrie says. As for the BFI Film Fund, she says, "They sadly declined *Starred Up* but we are now developing some projects with their assistance."

Berrie retains the caution of a battle-scarred independent producer, but the fact that she is talking to *Sight & Sound* from the Calgary set of Mackenzie's first North American TV series, *Damnation* (for USA Network, show runner Tony Tost and executive producer James Mangold), tells its own story.

Chris Pine and Ben Foster in *Hell or High Water*

"Of course things have changed, and the start of the change was *Starred Up*," she says. "In the current landscape, because there is so much television, directors are hard to come by, cast are hard to come by, and right at this moment in time David is hot property. Long may it continue. It should mean that things get easier."

In particular, it's Mackenzie's recent success drawing performances from actors of all stripes – Oscar winner (Jeff Bridges), admired character actor (Ben Mendelsohn), franchise star (Chris Pine) and fiery newcomer (Jack O'Connell) – that make him a magnet for talent, and thus for Hollywood's attention.

"Actors absolutely love him," agrees Berrie. "And quite right too, because he takes them to a very safe place, and once they are in that place he allows them to explore and experiment. It's an incredibly liberating experience for them."

DAVID MACKENZIE AT UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
Hell or High Water	2016	£1,519,788*
Starred Up	2014	£1,500,268
Young Adam	2003	£836,788
Hallam Foe	2007	£425,219
Asylum	2005	£106,236
Spread	2010	£59,578
Perfect Sense	2011	£51,548
The Last Great Wilderness	2003	£27,672
You Instead	2011	£13,695

***gross at press time**

VENICE

A VISIT FROM THE LAGOON SQUAD

Holy smoke: the great director in *David Lynch: The Art Life*

Unusually, Venice was dominated by documentaries – but literary adaptations and bizarre fantasy provided some exciting surprises

By Nick James

A wedding kept me at home for the first part of the Venice programme, so I missed the traditional Hollywood opening treats – Damien Chazelle's *La La Land*, Derek Cianfrance's *The Light Between Oceans*, Denis Villeneuve's *Arrival* and Tom Ford's *Nocturnal Animals*. I regretted not seeing Ulrich Seidl's *Safari* and François Ozon's *Frantz*, but my fears that I might have missed the best of Venice were allayed by a selection studded with strong surprises.

Andrew Dominik's **One More Time with Feeling** was the first of these – a documentary in which Nick Cave is seen recording his latest album, *Skeleton Tree*, and talking with his wife Susie about the awful death of their 15-year-old son Arthur. The film reveals the Caves as so naked and lost emotionally that, for all the parade of rock's mythomanic pomp, you'd be a monster not to empathise.

It was to the disadvantage of Katell Quillévéré's **Heal the Living** that I saw it straight after *One More Time...*. Reviewed positively elsewhere, this organ donorship drama lost me as soon as it introduced the parents of the kid surfer who is brain-dead because he wasn't wearing a seatbelt when his friend's van crashed: after witnessing real parental grief, the contrived variety wouldn't wash. It felt like an episode of *ER*, with everyone brimful of compassion and sensitivity – the idiosyncratic, modest, cultured and therefore deserving recipient for the boy's heart made it feel so pat. Yes, medical staff are usually wonderful, and patients can be patient, but examining an urgent political necessity (we need more donors) requires a less cosy worldview.

More welcome were two other French films less concerned with impressing emotionally. Benoît Jacquot's **Never Ever** adapts Don DeLillo's novella *The Body Artist* – not one of DeLillo's best, and therefore ripe for improvement. Jacquot often portrays *amour fou*, usually promulgating a central tenet of French culture – that you must be true to your feelings and let a love affair drag you to its destructive conclusion – too laboriously. Here, however, the instant affair between disillusioned filmmaker Rey (Mathieu Amalric) and beautiful performance artist Laura (Julia Roy, who also wrote the script) feels plausibly brutal and skips along breathlessly toward an early end. Laura is soon a young widow – Rey having opted out via his motorcycle – living in his creaky old coastal rented house, where she both sees him (ghost or figment?) and seems to become him. Roy and Amalric are both tremendous at the role-playing, and if the concepts prove too slippery to be handled better than clunkily, there's a lot of pleasure in watching the attempt.

Stéphane Brizé's **A Woman's Life** – an adaptation of Guy de Maupassant's early novel *Une vie* – is startlingly different in content from his social realist Cannes hit of 2015, *The Measure of a Man*. But the technique of accrued emotional impact through fast-moving changes of scene and action is similar. The novel traces over 27 years the torments and disappointments of Jeanne (Judith Chemla), a baron's daughter, as she's married off to a philandering viscount, who is then murdered, and thereafter raises their son too indulgently. Brizé's decision – with cinematographer Antoine Hébérle – to shoot in Academy ratio, using natural light as much as possible, suggests they were to some extent inspired by Andrea Arnold's *Wuthering Heights*; the cast is largely superb, not least Chemla, undemonstratively conveying anguish.

Venice isn't usually dominated by documentaries but there were two more, after Dominik's, that impressed: **Austerlitz** and *David Lynch: The Art Life*. Sergei Loznitsa has a deceptively simple way of constructing his films: he and DP Jesse Mazuch set up cameras around a public space and let them run, not caring if they're noticed. In *Austerlitz* the place is the one-time Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg concentration camp (the title is a nod to W.G. Sebald's Holocaust-haunted prose fiction). While

in Loznitsa's Ukrainian protest documentary *Maidan* (2014) colour images favoured an epic framing, here the shots are monochrome and more tightly framed, though the subject is still crowds and their behaviour. The cameras are less interested in the exhibits than in the behaviour of tourists engaged in the queasy activity of visiting a site of horror. As dozens of people are glimpsed disappearing into and emerging out of darkened huts, like ghosts, you can't help but imagine the political prisoners for whom the site was created.

To judge other human beings, to grade their worthiness, is to put yourself in the wrong place. But the shambling hundreds here, audio guides clamped to their ears, looking bored and lost and sometimes playful, do at times invite contempt. Promotional T-shirts and cargo shorts make us all look anonymous in our individualism. Why do tourists dress so casually to visit here? Is it because their education is yet to come? *Austerlitz* suggests it is. As we eavesdrop on the tour guides who fill in the grim historical background – with the microphones picking up camera bleeps and passing phrases from approximately the deep focus shot's focal distance – we see that the visit does have a sobering effect.

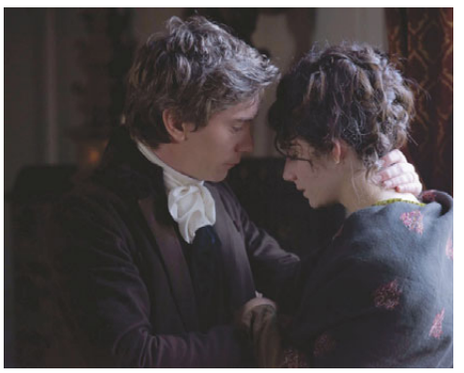
David Lynch: The Art Life begins with a shot of the ageing director himself sitting in profile in his art studio – his version of the ideal life – as he stares at a piece of his art off screen and smokes (drinking coffee and smoking is what Lynch long ago decided artists do). Shots of him working hard on art pieces – fiddling with latex, smearing peculiar textures on boards and canvas – make up much of the rest. The imagery is not always arresting, but Lynch narrates his life more thoroughly, poignantly and evocatively than I've ever heard him do before.

This is the second documentary Jon Nguyen and cinematographer Jason S have made about the director, after 2007's *Lynch*. Lynch fans are keenly aware of the dichotomy around which his persona orients itself, between happy perfect childhood and dark uncanny imaginings. Here, his idyllic childhood in Boise, Idaho, and the shock of removal to Virginia are made vivid – family and archive films and still images are used brilliantly, and Lynch's descriptions of incidents and anecdotes from his youth give an insight into the workings of his imagination. *David Lynch: The Art Life* is proof that Lynch never really left the 'home' that is the artist's studio – that that space is the crucible in which his cinema was made.

"Mother, you walked with me then... in the silence... before there was a world... before night or day... into stillness... when nothing was..." Terrence Malick-watchers will recognise the tone of the slow-drip voiceover (here read by Cate Blanchett): sententious and banal, seemingly designed to rival scripture, inviting parody. **The Voyage of Time: Life's Journey** measures time in billions of years, seeking to diminish human arrogance – an ambition that sits in contradiction to the narration's passive-aggressive smugness. The 'mother' remains undefined – candidates include mother earth, the sun, the universe, a female deity and the mother of Christ, but I *think* Malick means the life force itself.

Many gorgeous, often abstract images simulate and/or replicate creation in action. All cleave

Natalie Portman in *Jackie*



Swann Arlaud, Judith Chemla in *A Woman's Life*

'Jackie' is bravura, big-theme filmmaking of some daring and Portman is a surefire Oscar nomination off the back of it

to a *National Geographic*/TV nature programme aesthetic. We marvel at this kind of thing through nature series on TV. Though there's little in the way of 'nature red in tooth and claw', one devastating image of natural cruelty sticks in the mind: a living flatfish swims by seemingly unaware that a seal has just taken a perfect bite out of it; then, in a flash, we see the creature's chewed-up skeleton. But such shockingly casual moments are few. The dinosaurs are as unconvincing as the ones in *The Tree of Life* (2011); the comet that extinguishes them is an effective moment of invisible consequence. Neanderthal humans appear, lithe and spooked, looking like a modern dance troupe wearing prosthetic teeth, lost in the desert trying to steal an ostrich's eggs. Nothing is dwelt on long enough to register much. This near impactless 'documentary' is the creative vacuum Malick's career has long been hollowing towards. In Venice we watched a 90-minute feature version; the IMAX version is just 45 minutes long – in Malickian terms, the blink of an eye.

If you like the films of Emir Kusturica, you'll like **On the Milky Road** – the most Kusturicaesque of his recent films, a magic realist epic fable, set during the Bosnian war, about two lovers (Kusturica himself and Monica Bellucci) on the run from a vengeful, jealous British general with a penchant for flamethrowers. It presents one self-consciously wacky idea after another and achieves an OTT poetry that's all its own. It's just not for me. When it comes to fertile visions, I prefer the Mexican director Amat Escalante's **The Untamed**, a bizarre tale in which women and gay men alleviate the misery of their oppressed status by visiting something life-changing and strange that's kept in a farmer's barn. This is one to see before you read about it: you will not have seen anything like it before. I enjoyed, too, the Turkish director Reha Erdem's **Big Big World** in which an act of violence frees an orphaned brother and sister to live out a brief bucolic fantasy in a wood. Erdem (*Times and Winds*, 2006) has a fondness for overt symbolism that makes him unpalatable to most critics; I reckon he's got another brilliant film in him and though this isn't it, it's a reminder of what he can do, and deservedly took home the Special Jury Prize in the Horizons competition.

The most impressive fiction film I saw was Pablo Larraín's **Jackie**. Its attempt to put you inside the head of the first lady after she's seen her husband Jack assassinated is incredibly successful, and won Noah Oppenheim the screenplay prize in the main competition. It's less about grief than about crisis management. As Jackie, Natalie Portman shows us Jacqueline Bouvier's steely side – fighting for JFK's honour and reputation, and for the future of their children, as LBJ takes over. Framed by the cautious dance of a later press interview, the story is about how someone who had put the decor of the White House on television for the first time can be taken seriously by the ruthless politicians around her. It's bravura, big-theme filmmaking of some daring and Portman is a surefire Oscar nomination off the back of it.

i ***One More Time with Feeling*** **is reviewed on page 86**

Austerlitz

The Voyage of Time: Life's Journey

EXCESS ALL AREAS

The Toronto International Film Festival has got too big for its own good – but there's plenty of good stuff buried in there somewhere

By Tom Charity

For ten days (or at least, the first weekend) a top-heavy contingent of the North American film industry converges on the city of Toronto as if to validate the locals' high opinion of their hometown. This convergence creates its own critical mass so that, like Cannes, Toronto looms much larger than the mere movies that happen to screen there.

Still, there are a lot of them. Nearly 300 features! This is too much of a good, bad and indifferent thing, surely, but the goal is something for everyone, and it seems to work. A new ticketing system – with the delights of 'surge pricing' – meant that film fans could pay nearly $60 for the privilege of watching a special presentation (*Deepwater Horizon*, say) just a week or two before release, but with real live movie stars in the house. It sold out a 2,000 seat theatre, too. As Oscar tells us: nothing succeeds like excess.

But is TIFF a victim of its own excessive success? When even *Variety* complains about the lack of discrimination in the programming, some soul-searching may be in order ("TIFF has become a dumping ground, serving up hundreds of new movies with hardly any discernible sense of curation," concluded chief film critic Peter Debruge). There was a fracas too, about 'cheerleaders' hired to 'enhance' closing night festivities. Lest we forget, TIFF is the beneficiary of nearly CAN$5 million in public funding every year.

As for the movies, I've been told to ignore the repeats from Cannes, Berlin, Sundance and Venice wherever possible, which certainly creams off this year's crop – they don't call Toronto '*Cannes-ada*' for nothing – even if TIFF did claim 139 world premieres. But I will mention a masterpiece that premiered in Locarno in August: João Pedro Rodrigues's *The Ornithologist* is an extraordinarily rich, unpredictable fever-dream, a pilgrimage film that sits somewhere alongside Buñuel's *The Milky Way* (1969), Jarman's *Sebastiane* (1976) and Powell and Pressburger's *A Canterbury Tale* (1944) with its fusion of religious iconography and sexual and spiritual anguish, coupled with a palpable reverence for the mysterious cross-currents of the natural world – look out for it at the BFI London Film Festival.

The 'hot' Hollywood titles were *Arrival* (directed by Canada's Denis Villeneuve), and Damien Chazelle's *La La Land* (which came via Telluride and Venice and went on to win the Audience Prize – seen as a harbinger for the Academy Awards, for those who care about those things). The latter is a sunny, pastel-hued Jacques Demy-esque musical, breathlessly witty and charmingly romantic, even if there is something fogeyish about its twin fetish for jazz and cinema. (I loved every minute of it.) Meanwhile *Arrival* garnered praise for not being *Star Wars* (1977). Instead it's *Close Encounters* (1977), or maybe *Signs* (2002) – a serious-minded, smartly structured movie about communication and understanding which also wears its heart on its sleeve. Amy Adams is the linguistics professor delivered to an alien landing site (one of 12 across the planet) to establish a lingua franca before the military decides to do all the talking. *Arrival* plays, but it's too pat and too sentimental to really resonate.

Hooray for Hollywood: Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling in Damien Chazelle's *La La Land*

Amy Adams also stars in Tom Ford's *Nocturnal Animals*, as a cutting-edge LA artist consumed with well-deserved self-doubt when, over the course of a weekend, she reads her ex-husband's gripping but disturbingly violent new novel and realises her current husband (Armie Hammer) is having an affair.

The framing device sits uncomfortably between chi-chi satire and self-recrimination, but might also be an attempt to class up the brutal car-jacking thriller that constitutes the more entertaining film-within-the-film. The correlations between the two stories are few, beyond misogynistic impulses and Jake Gyllenhaal, playing both husband number one and his weedy fictional alter ego with counter-intuitive vehemence. Beneath a slick visual sheen and a seductive score, this is a pretentious, risible movie masquerading as an artistic statement.

'Arrival' is a serious-minded movie about communication and understanding, which wears its heart on its sleeve

Amy Adams in *Arrival*

On the other hand, content is king in Oliver Stone's *Snowden*. Some found this relatively muted biopic disappointingly flat (it's actually less of a thriller than the Snowden documentary *Citizenfour*), but its sobriety is grounded in diligence; this is a coherent, thorough account of how the patriotic computer whiz found himself with a front-row seat as the world wide web and the War on Terror coincided to make privacy appear quaintly anachronistic, a luxury the state could no longer afford, and damn the constitution. A restrained but precise Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Shailene Woodley also impress in this, the latest chapter in Stone's chronicle of American disillusionment. *Snowden* doesn't have the gripping sense of cutting-edge reportage you get in *Citizenfour* (Laura Poitras, that film's director, is played by Melissa Leo here), but it does flesh out Snowden's story without making the personal any less political.

Finally a few words on a trio of documentaries by three nonfiction artists: Errol Morris (*The B-Side: Elsa Dorfman's Portrait Photography*), Steve James (*Abacus: Small Enough to Jail*) and Werner Herzog (*Into the Inferno*). In each case, the filmmaker takes what might initially seem like a small or unpromising subject (respectively: a Polaroid portraitist; a Chinese-American community bank; and the volcano as a locus for myth) and through observation, patience and curiosity unearths unexpected layers of truth, humanity and transcendence. The question then is this: does TIFF get credit for showcasing gems like these, or blame for allowing them to go widely overlooked in the red carpet crush?

***Nocturnal Animals* is released in UK cinemas on 4 November and is reviewed on page 64**

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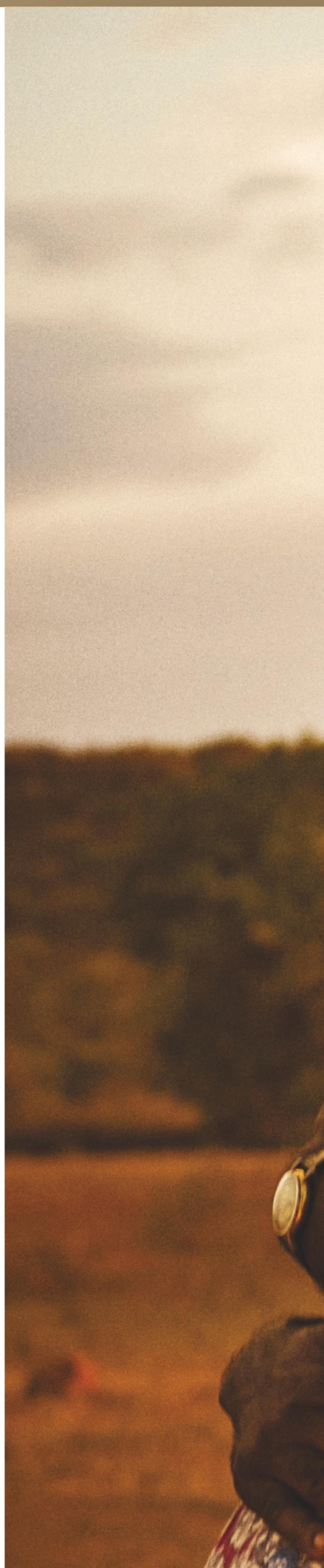
BLACK STAR

MOVING THE NEEDLE

DAVID OYELOWO

On the eve of the launch of the BFI's major Black Star project, celebrating black film and TV stars, one of our most exciting actors reflects on the nature of fame, the importance of role models and the fresh perspective offered by his latest movies 'Queen of Katwe' and 'A United Kingdom'

By Gaylene Gould



In his introduction to this year's Lagos spotlight programme at the Toronto International Film Festival, David Oyelowo jokingly put his success down to an odd mix of English deference and Nigerian swagger. Mixed with a huge amount of talent, these could well be the key ingredients of a star as unique as Oyelowo.

The first black actor to be cast by a major British stage company as a Shakespearean king, in 2000, he went on to become a trusted BBC performer, acting in popular shows such as *Spooks* (2002-04) and the TV adaptation of Andrea Levy's novel *Small Island* (2009). Since then he has played almost 60 onscreen roles, traversing geographies and production scales, from sci-fi epic *Interstellar* (2014) to the HBO one-man drama *Nightingale* (2014). However, it was his casting as Dr Martin Luther King in *Selma* (2014) that gained him entry to the VIP club. A British West African powerfully embodying one of the most studied men of the last century threw up questions about who gets to claim the title of star in this diaspora age.

Now Oyelowo is using his star heft to reimagine Africa on the big screen, starring opposite Lupita Nyong'o in Mira Nair's chess prodigy drama *Queen of Katwe* and in fellow British West African Amma Asante's *A United Kingdom*, in which he plays the first president of Botswana, who caused controversy in 1948 by marrying a white English woman. Historically, black stars such as Sidney Poitier and Lena Horne have done more than just entertain – they have worked to actively widen the cinematic landscape. As I discovered, as he prepares to give the keynote lecture at the BFI London Film Festival's Black Star Symposium, Oyelowo is taking this aspect of his star role very seriously indeed.

Gaylene Gould: We're talking as the BFI is about to launch its Black Star project. It could be said that you epitomise the concept of star power at the moment: you've lent your influence to Mira Nair's *Queen of Katwe*, and also you have that star power clout to bring people – like Amma Asante and Ava DuVernay – on to two very important films in *Selma* and *A United Kingdom*. Do you feel like a star?

David Oyelowo: That term 'star' is very nebulous. I've heard it described as someone who, when they decide to go to work, they put other people to work. So, I guess that yes, when I decide to do a movie, it creates opportunities for other people. But more specifically for me, it creates opportunities for other people who I feel aren't having the opportunities they should be having. If I can do that, I will do that. If that's the definition of star power, I don't take it for granted. I'm absolutely aware of moments in the past where other people's power – whether we call it star power, notoriety or just plain and simple power – has been the difference-maker for me. So while I have a modicum of notoriety and a voice that is being listened to, the idea is to do as much damage as possible in the direction that I feel things need to go.

GG: Who were those people who you either looked up to or who gave you that helping hand?

DO: Michael Boyd at the Royal Shakespeare Company was somebody who single-mindedly cast me as Henry VI. I didn't realise then that it had never been played by a black actor before, and he didn't either. It became quite a noisy piece of casting, but he beautifully maintained that he just cast the best person for the job. That was a formative moment, not just in my career, but in shifting my perspectives as to what is possible.

HAPPY TOGETHER
David Oyelowo as the first president of Botswana, Seretse Khama, and Rosamund Pike as his wife Ruth in Amma Asante's *A United Kingdom*

Bharat Nalluri, who is a director of Indian descent, cast me in *Spooks*. That role was not race-specific, and began in earnest my screen career. There were directors like Ngozi Onwurah and writer Sharon Foster – Sharon wrote *Shoot the Messenger* [2006], and Ngozi directed. That was a formative opportunity, getting to play the lead in a BBC drama, a really three-dimensional and complex role. In the US Oprah Winfrey has been a huge champion of mine since I did *The Butler* [2013] with her. I told her of my dream of playing Dr King, and she took it upon herself to help me achieve that dream.

Cameron McCracken at Pathé is someone who, very evidently has looked to make films about marginalised groups, but without that being charity – whether it's *Suffragette* [2015] or *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* [2013] or *Pride* [2014], and now *A United Kingdom*. Lee Daniels is another person I did two films with, back to back, *The Paperboy* [2012] and *The Butler*. He plucked me out of obscurity, really. He was the first to actually cast me as Dr King in *Selma* [2014] – even though he didn't go on to do the film, he completely reshaped the trajectory of my career.

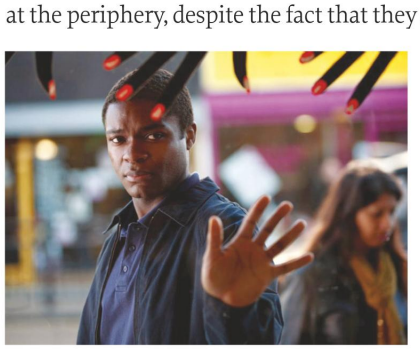
A lot of the people I mention are people of colour, and they want to see films and images out there that reflect who they are and what they are. They're people who are intentional about moving the needle and reflecting the world we actually live in, and I have been a huge beneficiary of that.

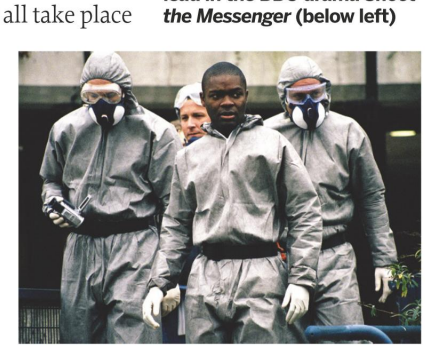
GG: Amma Asante calls *A United Kingdom* your passion project, and obviously it's had a particular resonance for you. Why this story at this particular moment?

DO: It really reflects something I never saw while I lived and grew up in the UK. We all love a period drama in the UK, as do I, and I spent many a Sunday evening watching yet another iteration of Jane Austen or Dickens, or whatever it was that meant that bonnets were being worn and horses were being ridden. But as a proud Brit I never saw myself reflected. So inevitably, subconsciously, you feel like you're on the periphery of society. But that didn't chime with the life I was actually living – a very integrated British life. I knew black people had been in Britain for centuries, but that fact was never reflected on screen.

Also, I had seen films and been in films where Africa was portrayed, but it was always negatively: it was child soldiers, it was dictators, it was poverty, it was genocide. I never saw a love story – I certainly never saw one with black characters as protagonists or at the centre of the narrative. We were constantly being pushed to the fringes of a continent we call our own. It felt that these stories were made to cross over, and to do so they needed a white character to make them palatable. There is a long list of films we could name that seem to have had white protagonists crowbarred into the centre, with black characters at the periphery, despite the fact that they all take place in Africa. So when I happened across the book *Colour Bar* by Susan Williams, and I saw that front cover with a very self-possessed young man, Seretse Khama, with this glamorous woman, Ruth Williams, and that their story took place in the 1940s, I was just bowled over. It was the kind of story I hadn't seen, and that I wanted to see.

I spent many a Sunday evening in the UK watching yet another iteration of Jane Austen or Dickens on TV. But as a proud Brit I never saw myself reflected





SPY GAMES
David Oyelowo's onscreen career began in earnest in 2002 when he was cast in the series *Spooks* (below right), and in 2006 he landed the lead in the BBC drama *Shoot the Messenger* (below left)

GG: You've spoken about what you see as a necessity of telling black historical stories.

DO: What needs to happen is the creation of a foundation of context. One of the reasons I have a constant stream of friends who are black or Asian coming through my home in LA during pilot season or throughout the year bemoaning the fact that they're not getting opportunities in the UK is because subconsciously there is still resistance in the UK to the fact that we are a part of British life in a very real, comprehensive and undeniable way. Otherwise there would be no reason to constantly deny that you could consistently have black and Asian and other ethnic minorities in roles – not just as a token, not just as a means of patting backs every now and again, but consistently in a way that reflects British society.

If you are constantly bombarded with images that sanction the idea that Great Britain is white, and has been white for centuries, and that the multicultural society we live in is a newer thing, then if you are a person who is resistant to multiculturalism, consciously or unconsciously you can validate your reasons for not seeing more people of colour on TV. Unfortunately, you've got to break down that prejudice by educating people with films like *A United Kingdom*, or a TV show I did called *Small Island*, about the Windrush [immigrants from the Caribbean]. Films like those help give people context as to how Britain became multicultural, and what the by-products of colonialism actually are. You can't go and paint three-quarters of the world pink, you can't go around the world colonising nations, whose people pledge allegiance to your queen, and then when those people take ownership somehow that's an affront.

GG: It seems like a very interesting moment for African diaspora filmmakers and actors now. You're British, of Nigerian descent. Where do you see yourself being positioned?

DO: I like to think of myself as an international actor, as I'm sure other stars do – they don't have to be limited to being an American actor or a Hollywood actor. If Will Smith goes around the world, I think he's just considered a global actor, same as Tom Cruise, same as Brad Pitt, same as George Clooney. I actually lived for a significant period of time in Africa – I lived in Nigeria for seven years. Great Britain is where I was born and lived most of my life, and I've now lived in the US for nearly ten years. I've played Americans, I've played Africans, I've played Europeans, and not just from an outsider perspective. I've lived in all of those places enough now to take some ownership of those roles when I'm playing them.

With regard to what you say about the moment we're in, I'm sceptical, because we've had these moments before. We had them in the 1990s with an explosion of black films by the likes of John Singleton, Spike Lee and Kasi Lemmons – a real movement happening which then petered out, because those directors weren't in my opinion given requisite opportunities within the studio system. We had a moment three or four years ago with *12 Years a Slave*, *The Butler* and *Fruitvale Station* [all 2013]. Everyone started patting themselves on the back, saying

we were in the middle of a new renaissance of black film because black protagonists were in films directed by people of colour. Fantastic, wonderful, absolutely, but what happens is that everyone gets happy that there is a moment, and then apathy sets in, and the status quo re-emerges as the reality of what the industry actually is. The only way it's not going to be just another moment is vigilance, making sure we don't pat people on the back for getting movies made that took 15 years, 10 years, five years to make. It just so happens they were all coming to fruition at the same time.

A United Kingdom took six years to make, during which time several directors turned it down because I was the only person attached or it just didn't interest them because it didn't speak to their history. Barry Jenkins, who's having great momentum right now with *Moonlight* – his last film was *Medicine for Melancholy* [2008], quite a few years ago. Or my friend Nate Parker – we've been friends since we did *Red Tails* [2012] together – he's been pushing *The Birth of a Nation* up the hill for seven years, with everyone telling him he was crazy for trying to make it. It just so happens that these films are coming to the fore at the same time.

GG: One thing that is perhaps different though is that many of those moments were American-led, but now it feels fresh in that many West African British stars are gaining influence in front of and behind the camera. Do you recognise that, and what do your African American colleagues feel about it?

DO: It's due to the fact that about 10 to 12 years ago, as actors of West African descent in the UK, we felt we were on the hamster wheel – that the opportunities we were going to be afforded were going to remain at a certain level. So there was a bit of an exodus. As they say, every overnight success takes about 10 years of hard work, so our time in America grinding away is now leading to opportunities. I think it is a by-product of that, of what was happening in the UK then. Certainly for me, it was what prompted me to leave the UK, and it's taken this amount of time, paying my dues as it were, for what you're describing to become visible.

GG: Are you surprised by the position you find yourself in? Did you imagine it for yourself?

DO: I would be lying if I said I was surprised, primarily because I was pretty determined early on that I wasn't going to let geography determine my trajectory as an actor. That's why my move to America took place. I had constant evidence around me of the trajectory of my peers – of my white male peers. When I felt I was slipping behind, that's when I felt I needed to plant my seed in different ground.

I remember the first time I met James McAvoy doing *The Last King of Scotland* [2006], or Benedict Cumberbatch when he came to do an episode of *Spooks* [in 2003], or doing a photoshoot with Tom Hardy. We were all graduating drama school at around the same time, we were all doing plays in London, but there was a moment where I felt, "Ah, I can see where this is going to go." My heroes are all across the pond, I don't see too many examples [in the UK] of where I could go. James, Ben, Tom had Daniel Day-Lewis, who can live in the UK if he wants to, they had Ralph Fiennes, who can live in the UK if he wants to; they have these individuals who are beacons, North Stars to them as to where their careers can go, despite the fact that they choose to stay in the UK. I don't have that.

GLOBAL PLAYER
Madina Nalwanga as Ugandan chess prodigy Phiona Mutesi and David Oyelowo as missionary Robert Katende, who first introduces her to the game, in Mira Nair's *Queen of Katwe*

I have to go to where Denzel is thriving, I have to go to where Will Smith is thriving in order to hopefully continue to ascend. So I'm not surprised because I could see it coming, and that's why, reluctantly, I had to displace myself in order to keep my trajectory going.

GG: Do you have a vision of where you will be in ten years?

DO: I do. I hope the work I will have done will be reflective of who I am, of the world I live in. As an actor of colour I want to put things out into the world that my children will see themselves reflected in. I'm now segueing from doing things that move the needle in terms of seeing people of colour in the centre of the narrative, to shifting the perspective, to who is telling the story. Ava DuVernay directing *Selma* results in a very different movie than had a fantastic white male director made it. Not to say one is better, but the perspective is different, and that is interesting to me. Amma directing *A United Kingdom* is the same thing. Mira Nair with *Queen of Katwe* too.

I hope to continue to work with great directors, white and black, throughout my career, but what I'm hoping for from the next ten years is to make sure that the perspectives from which the stories I'm involved in remain diverse in terms of who's telling them, and in line with reflecting the society we actually live in – as opposed to what can be a fairly insidious shaping of the narrative around people of colour. These stories need to be told more and more from within as opposed to from without, in order for them to feel more real, more authentic, and, to be perfectly frank, for the audience to experience new perspectives which ultimately help break down prejudice and make people less ignorant about groups they marginalise on the basis of fear. If you know more about a person then you're less fearful of a person, and you're then less likely to be prejudiced towards that person. So over the next ten years my hope is, whether it's from in front of the camera or from behind the camera, to just continue moving that needle.

Queen of Katwe is released on 21 October and is reviewed on page 88. _A United Kingdom_ is released on 25 November and will be reviewed in our next issue. David Oyelowo gives the keynote speech at the BFI London Film Festival Black Star Symposium on 6 October

BLACK STAR

SCENES FROM A MARRIAGE

Director Amma Asante relates how David Oyelowo tipped her off to the interracial love story 'A United Kingdom', and explains why the tale held such a personal resonance for her

By Gaylene Gould

Out of Africa: Amma Asante with David Oyelowo on the set of *A United Kingdom*

Gaylene Gould: I'm interested in the rise of British stars of West African descent in cinema at the moment, with people like David Oyelowo. How does that feel, being a British Ghanaian director. Do you feel part of something?

Amma Asante: I don't know that you ever sit down and say to yourself, "Wow, I'm a star," or, "Wow, I've arrived at a place," because the struggle continues. Your ambition continues. We're at a place definitely where the door seems to be opening a little bit, but there's still so much to do. So much of where we are at the moment with telling stories is historical. It's something David and I would say to each other: sometimes when you're a storyteller you have to start with your history – those stories create a platform. It's only when you feel that the balance has been addressed, that we can be at the centre of these stories and see them through our gaze rather than through other people's, that we can start to have a genuine freedom in the fictional stories we tell.

GG: Your relationship with Oyelowo was central to the making of *A United Kingdom*. You knew each other before you started work on it?

AA: I co-created and wrote a series for the BBC called *Brothers and Sisters* back in 1998, and David was cast straight out of drama school as one of the leads. We always stayed in touch. Eighteen years later, I'd just come off of *Belle* [2013] when David contacted me and said, "Look, I've got this project: it's a book written by Susan Williams called *Colour Bar*. It's about a king called Seretse Khama who comes to England to study and meets a white woman and decides to go back to Africa with her." The elements that were attractive to me were to do with African independence, in the fact that in 1947, although no sub-Saharan country had yet attained its independence, the seeds were being planted. But at the same time ideas of white supremacy were growing in Africa, so you had these two ideas fighting for dominance. I was fascinated, especially as the child of Ghanaian parents. My dad stood in independence square and waved the flag as the Gold Coast became Ghana. I knew what that independence meant to them. The story dealt with elements of the two continents that are responsible for raising me, because that is an identity of its own, being both British and African. To be able to include that identity in a film like this felt very important. I also thought it was important that it be someone with that identity who takes the reins of the film, and that it be someone like David who also has that identity who plays the role of Seretse.

Also, I've always been very interested in the 'Other', and I thought it would be interesting to explore a white person who in this story is the 'Other', unlike the traditional story of it being the black person. I thought about how my mother would have felt, how my aunties would have felt, if their brother had brought someone home who was different, and said, "This will be your queen." I wanted to make sure that point of view was included. Because it's important, in Africa we have traditions we hold dear, and if they're shaken or challenged... I wanted to show that the shoe fits on both feet – it's not always about immigrants coming to Europe, it works the other way too."

GG: Oyelowo has carved an interesting space for himself playing the kind of heroic characters you speak of. What was it like to work with him?

AA: David wanted someone on board who would fight to present him in the way I wanted to present him. We wanted Seretse to be a hero, to be seen as a man who is to be respected for his actions for his country. As a black man, he's someone so rarely seen in that position. The default, norm presentation of a hero has been one way, but another director can come on and say, "No, there's another norm." The same as Gugu Mbatha-Raw in *Belle* – she's an English Rose. She may not look like your English Rose, but she is mine. Seretse may not be the president you may expect to see if you googled 'president' and 'film', aside from Mandela perhaps; but when I think of a president, I think of a black person as much as a white. So in many ways it was for me to fight for that on David's behalf, and ensure that what we, the people of colour on set, saw on screen was what we understand.

Sometimes when you're a storyteller you have to start with your history – those stories create a platform

GG: You want to make films about black heroes. How important is it to cast people who have a star quality to achieve that?

AA: It's not just important to work with them, it's important to create them. The credit at the end of *Belle* read 'Introducing Gugu Mbatha-Raw'. Now people will have seen Gugu in many things, but we used the term 'introducing' because as a lead black female actor, carrying a movie from beginning to end, we were introducing her to the world. I believe she has the talent and the abilities to be a leading actress, just as Nicole Kidman or any of the other brilliant white actresses you could list.

It's important to create stars so that eventually you can get to a place where someone like David can say, "I've found this book," and be in a position to get this movie financed based on his wanting to be in it. And it doesn't stop there. You want to further David's connection with an audience, to show his versatility and the variety of his capabilities. And with lesser-known names, you hope to create through your film a situation where one day they too might be someone important, someone with the position and influence to make things happen.

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BLACK STAR

BURNING ILLUSIONS

BLACK BRITISH FILM STARDOM

Black actors may have been a presence in British films since the early years of cinema, but a depressing lack of opportunities has forced the vast majority to rely on the small screen to help make ends meet or to cross the Atlantic in search of real fame and creative fulfilment

By Ashley Clark

"I felt pushed out of the UK *because of the glass ceiling I could feel my head bobbing against. I could see that actors, my peers, those who had a similar trajectory to me, were going on to do movies, to play leads. I started to feel I was going to go round in circles. Nice TV, back to the theatre, nice TV… but I wasn't going to be James McAvoy, I wasn't going to be Benedict Cumberbatch."*— David Oyelowo, 2015

If I had to pick one moment that encapsulates for me the haphazard nature of black British film stardom – a jigsaw narrative that lacks any clear arc and is characterised by frustration, inconsistency and occasional flashes of hope – it would be a scene from the first act of Neil Jordan's British-Irish thriller *The Crying Game* (1992), a picture I love dearly. The African-American actor Forest Whitaker, playing Jody, a British soldier of Antiguan descent from North London, is strapped to a chair, with a cloth sack over his head. Jody's relationship with his IRA captor Fergus (Stephen Rea) has advanced to the point where there is a tentative bond between them, so he launches into the fable of the scorpion and the frog, an allegorical riff on the inevitability of human nature in which a wary frog agrees to ferry a scorpion over a river, only for the scorpion, obeying its natural instincts, to sting the frog halfway across, thereby dooming them both. But what is his accent all about?

"Woy d'ya steeng me Meesta Scorpeeyun?" Whitaker over-enunciates from behind his hood. "For naah we bofe will draan."

Now, it's not that Whitaker gives a bad performance – on the contrary, his portrayal of a hulking, tender squaddie brought low by circumstance is deeply touching – or that actors aren't supposed to play characters from different countries. One could argue Whitaker's casting befits a film with such a daringly fluid approach to issues of nationality, gender, race and sexuality. It's not even that his accent is so unspeakable. Rather, it's that by 1992, one would have thought that the production team might have been able to scare up an actual black Brit to take on this small but pivotal role, instead of relying on an import to deliver the goods. After all, as Stephen Bourne reports in his essential 2001 book *Black in the British Frame*, black Britons had been a presence in British cinema since the 1910s, 20s and 30s, when they appeared as extras and bit players – albeit often as docile, ill-defined Africans in films that glorified the Empire. Yet, decades on, no black British actor was considered suitable to authentically represent his country in a film that went on to win an Oscar. *Woy d'ya steeng me?* indeed.

CROSSING CONTINENTS Chiwetel Ejiofor (right) as Solomon Northup in Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave* (2011); and (left) Forest Whitaker and Stephen Rea in Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* (1992)

Whitaker wasn't unique. Four years before *The Crying Game*, a pre-megastardom Denzel Washington was flown in from America to play the lead – another soldier, a British Falklands veteran confronting poverty and racism after leaving the army – in Martin Stellman's patchy thriller *For Queen and Country* (1988). "I wanted to use a black English actor to portray what is ostensibly a black English story and struggle," said Trix Worrell, the film's writer (and future creator of hit Channel 4 sitcom *Desmond's*). But money, or the promise of money at least, spoke loudest: Worrell's pleas fell on deaf ears, and the producers went over his head, selecting an actor they felt would propel more bums toward seats. Despite this, *For Queen and Country* ultimately failed to secure a wide national release, and is now regarded, at best, as a cult curio of special interest to fans of dodgy London accents.

The casting of Washington and Whitaker in these roles hints at the historical trickiness of navigating home terrain for black British actors, who have had to contend with a depressing lack of opportunities; an erratic national film industry in thrall to Hollywood; stereotyped, repetitive roles (criminals, coppers, servants, etc); a pronounced lack of authorial diversity; and the enduring lure-cum-safety net of the small screen: fine for domestic recognition, but hardly a shortcut to global adulation, meaty roles and big-time salaries – ie, the hallmarks of a real movie star. I'll address these issues in due course, but it seems sensible to first acknowledge that both *The Crying Game* and *For Queen and Country* exist on a long continuum that has seen black actors crossing the Atlantic in both directions.

HOME AND AWAY

While the Bermuda-born Ernest Trimingham may have been the most recognisable silent-era black screen presence in Britain, taking key roles in western *Jack, Sam and Pete* (1919) and children's fantasy *Where the Rainbow Ends* (1921), the nation's first genuine black film star was another foreigner – New Jersey native Paul Robeson. Treated as an outcast in Jim Crow-era America, where roles for black actors were generally limited to coons, buffoons and quadroons, Robeson moved to Britain in the late 1920s, and remained there until the outbreak of World War II. This six-foot three-inch wellspring of charisma was equally powerful as a screen and stage actor, a bass baritone singer and a political firebrand who strove tirelessly for dignity and complexity in representation.

Robeson became a major box-office draw in British dramas. He played a visiting American dock worker in both *Song of Freedom* (1936) and *Big Fella* (1937) – in the former, Robeson was given final-cut approval, an unprecedented option at the time for an actor of any race. He was a war hero in *Jericho* (aka *Dark Sands*, 1937), and played the wonderfully named sailor David Goliath in the stirring Rhonda-set *The Proud Valley* (1940), which reflected Robeson's real-life public support for striking Welsh miners.

MINER ACCOMPLISHMENTS
***The Proud Valley* (1940), starring Paul Robeson (above left) reflected the actor's real-life public support for striking Welsh miners**

But it wasn't all plain sailing for Robeson in Britain. Much to his dismay, his character in Zoltan Korda's adventure film *Sanders of the River* (1935), Bosambo, was transformed in the editing process from a dignified Nigerian leader to a servile lickspittle to British colonial rule. "It is the only film of mine that can be shown in Italy or Germany," Robeson complained in 1938, "for it shows the Negro as fascist states desire him: savage and childish."

Following Robeson's example, other American performers of the period also left home for the promise of a brighter future in Britain – and many found notable roles alongside Robeson. South Carolina's Nina Mae McKinney, who starred in America's first all-black-cast sound film *Hallelujah!* (1929), appeared in *Sanders of the River*. Fellow New Jerseyan singer-actress Elisabeth Welch duetted with Robeson in *Song of Freedom* and *Big Fella*, and also guest-starred in several British films, including *Death at Broadcasting House* (1934), *Alibi* (1942) and *Dead of Night* (1945). Welch was a familiar face on

EMPIRE STATE
(Below, from left) Cassie McFarlane and Victor Romero-Evans in Menelik Shabazz's *Burning an Illusion* (1981), Johnny Sekka with Sylvia Syms in Roy Ward Baker's *Flame in the Streets* (1961), and Horace Ové's *Pressure* (1975), the first UK feature by a black director

British television for many decades. Her last film role – a jaw-dropper – came as a gold-clad goddess in Derek Jarman's art-punk Shakespeare riff *The Tempest* (1979). Her performance of 'Stormy Weather' in Jarman's film, delivered against a backdrop of statuesque, muscular sailors, is a clear highlight.

It wasn't until the 1950s – the decade in which my own paternal grandparents arrived in London from Jamaica as part of the Windrush generation – that black actors, settlers from the Caribbean and Africa, would make their presence felt more consistently in a spate of liberal-minded film dramas grounded in the social anxieties of a changing Britain. The Bermuda-born actor Earl Cameron made his feature debut in Basil Dearden's 1951 thriller *Pool of London*, playing merchant seaman Johnny, a misunderstood tearaway who falls for a white girl (Susan Shaw) – the film is widely regarded as being one of the first to deal with interracial romance. The handsome, ever-composed Cameron was the closest Britain had to an authentic black film idol in the period, despite not being marketed as such. He would go on to appear in *Simba* (1955), as a fiercely ethical medical doctor; *The Heart Within* (1957), as a West Indian dock worker suspected of murder; and two tense, harsh thrillers made in the aftermath of the 1958 Notting Hill race riots: Dearden's *Sapphire* (1959) and Roy Ward Baker's *Flame in the Streets* (1961). Cameron is one of the most assured, impactful performers in the latter film, playing under-pressure West Indian factory worker Gabriel Gomez, but tellingly his name was nowhere to be seen on any of the film's theatrical posters.

Cameron's *Flame in the Streets* co-star, the Senegal-born Johnny Sekka, summarised the plight of black actors in Britain in a 1969 interview with the *Times*: "Sean Connery, Terry Stamp, Michael Caine, Tom Courtenay, John Hurt. I started out with these people. Today they are stars. I'm not jealous. But why the hell not me? I have the same talent and ability." His rhetorical thrust was clear; whether through studied ignorance or systemic racism, black actors weren't getting a proper look-in. Sekka, like Cameron, found little major work without a studio contract, joining the likes of black Londoner Paul Danquah (*A Taste of Honey*, 1961) and British Guiana-born Cy Grant (*Safari*, 1956; *Calypso*, 1958) in doing solid if intermittent work on television, interspersed with even rarer film roles, which were almost always race-specific. (It should be noted here that if the situation for black male film actors in Britain was bad at the time, it was downright dreadful for black women.)

Just a few years later, the arrival in England of the glamorous Sidney Poitier further illustrated the shortfall in genuine stardom for home-based talent. In 1967, the same year as his two US box-office smash hits *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *In The Heat of the Night*, Poitier starred as a Chicago schoolteacher doing his best with a class of East London scamps in James Clavell's drama *To Sir, with Love*. In the 1970s – generally considered a parlous decade for the British film industry – Poitier continued to expand his global brand, opting to set his second directorial effort, the unusual romantic drama *A Warm December* (1973), in London. The film sees Earl Cameron, ten years Poitier's senior, play a now familiar supporting role as the ambassador of a fictional African republic. (In 2016, Poitier was awarded a Bafta fellowship – the organisation's highest honour. Meanwhile Cameron, aged 99 at the time of writing, was last seen playing 'Elderly Bald Man' in Christopher Nolan's 2010 blockbuster *Inception* – a remarkable testament to his staying power.)

The handsome, ever-composed Earl Cameron was the closest Britain had to an authentic black film idol in the 1950s

A SHORE THING
The Bermuda-born actor Earl Cameron made his feature debut in Basil Dearden's *Pool of London* (1951), playing a merchant seaman who falls for a white girl – one of the first portrayals of interracial romance in British cinema

Astoundingly, it wasn't until the end of the 1980s that a black British actor would attempt in earnest to pull a reverse-Robeson/Poitier manoeuvre, and make a big impact on US soil. In 1989, Dudley's own Lenny Henry – comfortably the biggest black comedy star on UK television, despite drawing criticism in some quarters for perpetuating racial stereotypes – appeared in his first American film, the obscure erotic thriller *The Suicide Club*, as a love interest to Mariel Hemingway ("Not the truly terrible film you might expect," reassured the *New York Times*). That same year Henry also starred as an enigmatic department store employee in the Oscar-winning short *Work Experience*, and in his own standup comedy movie *Lenny Live and Unleashed*, inspired by the concert films of Richard Pryor and Eddie Murphy. Shortly thereafter, Henry was headhunted by Disney honcho Jeffrey Katzenberg to play the lead in Charles Lane's New York-set *True Identity* (1991), which saw Henry play Miles Pope, a struggling American actor who, following a series of odd plot convolutions, disguises himself as a white man via elaborate prosthetics in order to hide from the Mafia.

True Identity had some slyly ironic things to say about race and representation, and Henry gave a likeable performance – a cuddlier Eddie Murphy, if you will – but it tanked at the box office, and displeased critics. Henry had signed a lucrative three-year contract with Walt Disney, but such was the magnitude of the film's failure, both sides quietly agreed to forget about it. Henry later relayed his unhappy experience: "When I was out there I felt like this tiny little link in the chain... I really didn't like not having any say." Henry returned home, set up his own production company, Crucial Productions, and focused on building his name in TV sitcoms. His next feature film gig was voicing 'Dre Head', a dreadlocked Jamaican shrunken head in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004). Knighted in 2015, Henry remains

GANG OF FOUR
Peckham-born Nigerian Brit John Boyega burst on to the scene as a 19-year-old in 2011 in Joe Cornish's *Attack the Block* (above), before being cast in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015)

a much-loved figure in England, but genuine megawatt film stardom has, for now, eluded him.

Actors can only take the roles available to them, and one key reason for the historical paucity of home-grown black film stars on UK soil must lie in the shortfall in authorial diversity in British cinema, and the resultant dearth of films told from a black perspective. In the years since 1975, when Trinidad-born Horace Ové co-wrote and directed West London neorealist drama *Pressure*, widely regarded as the first 'black' feature film to be made in Britain (black director, writers, cast and milieu; theatrically screened), no black British director has completed more than three theatrically released features.

MISSING IN ACTION

It's hardly surprising then that so few of the black actors in those rare, exotic happenings – a British film made by a black director – have parlayed their talents into high-profile careers at home. Herbert Norville gave a wonderfully engaging performance as *Pressure*'s rumpled youth Tony, but ultimately wound up on the TV bit-part circuit. Cassie McFarlane's luminous turn as a young Londoner experiencing a political awakening in Menelik Shabazz's *Burning an Illusion* (1981) netted her an *Evening Standard* Award for Most Promising New Actress, but after a smattering of TV gigs, she was last seen in a small role in a 2006 episode of BBC drama *Silent Witness*. Ové's cricket-and-culture clash comedy *Playing Away* (1986), one of the first films fully funded by Channel 4, then in its influential infancy, handed a preciously rare lead role to Guyanese-British TV stalwart Norman Beaton, who would soon become a household name in *Desmond's*. Mo Sesay and Valentine Nonyela, the charismatic co-leads of Isaac Julien's colourful 70s-set thriller *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), racked up eight separate minor characters between them in long-running ITV police drama *The Bill*.

British cinema of the 80s and 90s in general offered scant room for black performers. Cathy Tyson brought soul and wit to a remote role as the "tall, thin, black tart" in Neil Jordan's *Mona Lisa* (1986). The title of Karen Alexander's perceptive 2000 essay, 'Black British Cinema in the 1990s: Going Going Gone' succinctly summed up the situation in that decade. Mainstream British cinema typically squeezed out the reality of black British life, or rendered it with tiresome clichés. Horse (Paul Barber), the sole black character in *The Full Monty* (1997) was named after the huge size of his penis, which happened to be his defining characteristic. In *Notting Hill* (1999), Richard Curtis and Roger Michell contrived to sell the world a bastardised version of the West London district, betraying the earthy earlier work of actors like Earl Cameron by transforming an area defined by diversity, the history of the British Black Power movement, the Mangrove restaurant, Claudia Jones and social struggle, into a starchy metropolis "wholly populated with mindless, twittering, wittering, lily-white rich", as writer China Miéville so memorably put it.

Mainstream British cinema in the 1990s typically squeezed out the reality of black British life, or rendered it with tiresome clichés

The most notable black British film performance of the 1990s was given by the RADA-trained Marianne Jean-Baptiste in Mike Leigh's Palme d'Or-winning *Secrets & Lies* (1996). With great warmth and hypnotic stillness she played the long lost (phenotypically unconvincing, it must be said) mixed-race daughter of a white mother (Brenda Blethyn). At just shy of 30, Jean-Baptiste became the first black British woman to be nominated for an Oscar. This should have been the springboard for a graduation to bigger roles. Instead, a year later on British Screen's 50th anniversary, the funding body invited 50 of the UK's top actors to the Cannes festival, but Jean-Baptiste was not among them.

Incensed and heartbroken, she told the *Guardian* in 1997 that she hadn't been offered any roles in a year, adding, "The old men running the industry just have not got a clue. They've got to come to terms with the fact that Britain is no longer a totally white place where people ride horses, wear long frocks and drink tea... It is a shame on Britain. I see myself as British and I want to be celebrated by Britain." Today Jean-Baptiste lives in Los Angeles, and works most regularly on US cable television.

One of the more successful British actresses of recent times is Sophie Okonedo, a Tony Award-winner and Oscar nominee (for 2004's *Hotel Rwanda*). In a 2014 interview, she expressed her frustration with British cinema's heritage fetish, an obsession with limiting consequences for black talent. "Costume and period drama [must be] at least 40 per cent of what we do here. Which means that 40 per cent of opportunities are closed to me already." Some filmmakers have challenged the genre's inherent whiteness, leading to interesting roles for black and mixed-race actors: in Andrea Arnold's mud-caked adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* (2011), James Howson became the first actor of colour to play Emily Brontë's Heathcliff on screen, while Amma Asante's *Belle* (2013), about an 18th-century mixed-race aristocrat (played by Gugu Mbatha-Raw), was quietly radical in its investigation of racial complexity, despite its glossy exterior.

Mbatha-Raw's career, like Okonedo's, reflects the dominant contemporary narrative around black British stardom: occasional strong UK roles followed by exodus to America, where the balance of race-specific roles and colour-blind casting is more mixed. Post-*Belle*, Mbatha-Raw's CV comprises a long list of US credits (*Jupiter Ascending*, 2015; *Concussion*, 2015; *Free State of Jones*, 2016). Peckham-born Nigerian Brit John Boyega, a product

of the influential Identity Agency for actors of colour (founded by Femi Oguns), looks likely to follow a similar path. Boyega burst on to the scene as a 19-year-old in London-set sci-fi *Attack the Block* (2011), then – stunningly – he was cast in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015), and now looks set, just maybe, to become Britain's first genuine black Hollywood superstar.

Twenty years Boyega's senior, Idris Elba took a longer route to prominence. Having cut a swathe as charismatic criminal Russell 'Stringer' Bell on HBO's *The Wire* (2002-08) and become an authoritative UK TV presence on BBC's *Luther* (2010-15), Elba is now a blockbuster franchise regular in films such as *Star Trek Beyond* (2016) and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), if not quite an above-the-line Hollywood star – though if the Bond producers can get over the idea of a black man playing a fictional character, he may one day be 007. Speaking of Bond, Naomie Harris made history by becoming the first black Moneypenny in *Skyfall* (2012), but is also finding more regular work in high-profile US film appearances *(Southpaw*, 2015; *Moonlight*, 2016; *Collateral Beauty*, 2016). Both Noel Clarke (with *Star Trek into Darkness*) and Ashley Walters (*Get Rich or Die Tryin'*, 2005) made brief sojourns into big-budget American cinema, but are best known in UK film terms for their appearances in dramas focused on urban alienation and crime. Walters shone in 2004's powerful *Bullet Boy*, while Clarke has done good business at the UK box office with his *Kidulthood* trilogy (2008-16), the second and third instalments of which he also directed.

Two classically trained British actors of Nigerian descent have found remarkable success playing historical American characters. Chiwetel Ejiofor in fact began his film career in Hollywood, starring, at 19, as interpreter Ensign Covey in Steven Spielberg's *Amistad* (1997). He has since built an impressive US-heavy CV, with occasional returns to the UK in films that display his range: a tightly wound Nigerian immigrant in *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002); a flamboyant drag queen in *Kinky Boots* (2005). Ejiofor's career high-point to date came with his Oscar-nominated role as enslaved free black man Solomon Northup in Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave* (2013). Meanwhile, David Oyelowo has amassed an extraordinary set of credits portraying black American heroes: a preacher in civil rights-era drama *The Help* (2011), a fighter pilot in WWII drama *Red Tails* (2012), a Civil War cavalryman in *Lincoln* (2012), a Black Panther-turned-state senator in *The Butler* (2013) and Martin Luther King Jr in *Selma* (2014).

It may be that Oyelowo's record alarms American audiences in the same way that I reacted to Forest Whitaker in *The Crying Game*. So be it – American audiences have had Samuel L. Jackson, Will Smith, Kerry Washington, Danny Glover, Angela Bassett, Eddie Murphy, Whoopi Goldberg and Morgan Freeman – to name just a few – to cushion the blow. While Oyelowo's success abroad is certainly something to cheer, I can't help but feel a little rueful that American history is brought to life by British talent, while at the same time so many black British historical stories remain untold on the big screen. Perhaps the recent semi-groundswell of black British authorial talent (such as Asante, McQueen, Clarke, Debbie Tucker Green, Destiny Ekaragha, Femi Oyeniran, Mo Ali, Cecile Emeke) can make it happen.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to see cinema portray pioneering black British figures? Chiwetel Ejiofor is Olaudah Equiano in *The Abolition Diaries*! Naomie Harris is Mary Seacole in *British Hotel*! Adrian Lester is Trevor McDonald in *The News At Ten*! David Harewood is Daley Thompson in *The Decathlete*! But I'm getting carried away. For now, I'll restrict myself to a more modest hope: that if a part opens up in a major UK film for a black British soldier undergoing a spiritual crisis, it is filled by a black British actor. I don't think I could take being stung once more by 'Meesta Scorpeeyun'.

This article is taken from *Black Star: A BFI Compendium*, a new book to accompany the BFI's major UK-wide celebration of black actors in film and television, which runs until the end of December and includes a season at BFI Southbank, London

LONDON TO BRIGHTON
Cathy Tyson brought soul and wit to her portrayal of the prostitute in Neil Jordan's 'Mona Lisa' (1986)

IDENTITY POLITICS
(Below, from left) Lenny Henry in *True Identity* (1991), Brenda Blethyn and Marianne Jean-Baptiste in Mike Leigh's *Secrets & Lies* (1996), and Noel Clarke in *Adulthood* (2008), which he also directed

BLACK STAR

VITAL STATISTICS

The paucity of roles for black actors in contemporary UK cinema is laid bare in an extensive BFI research project that seeks to provide concrete data to aid the debate about onscreen diversity

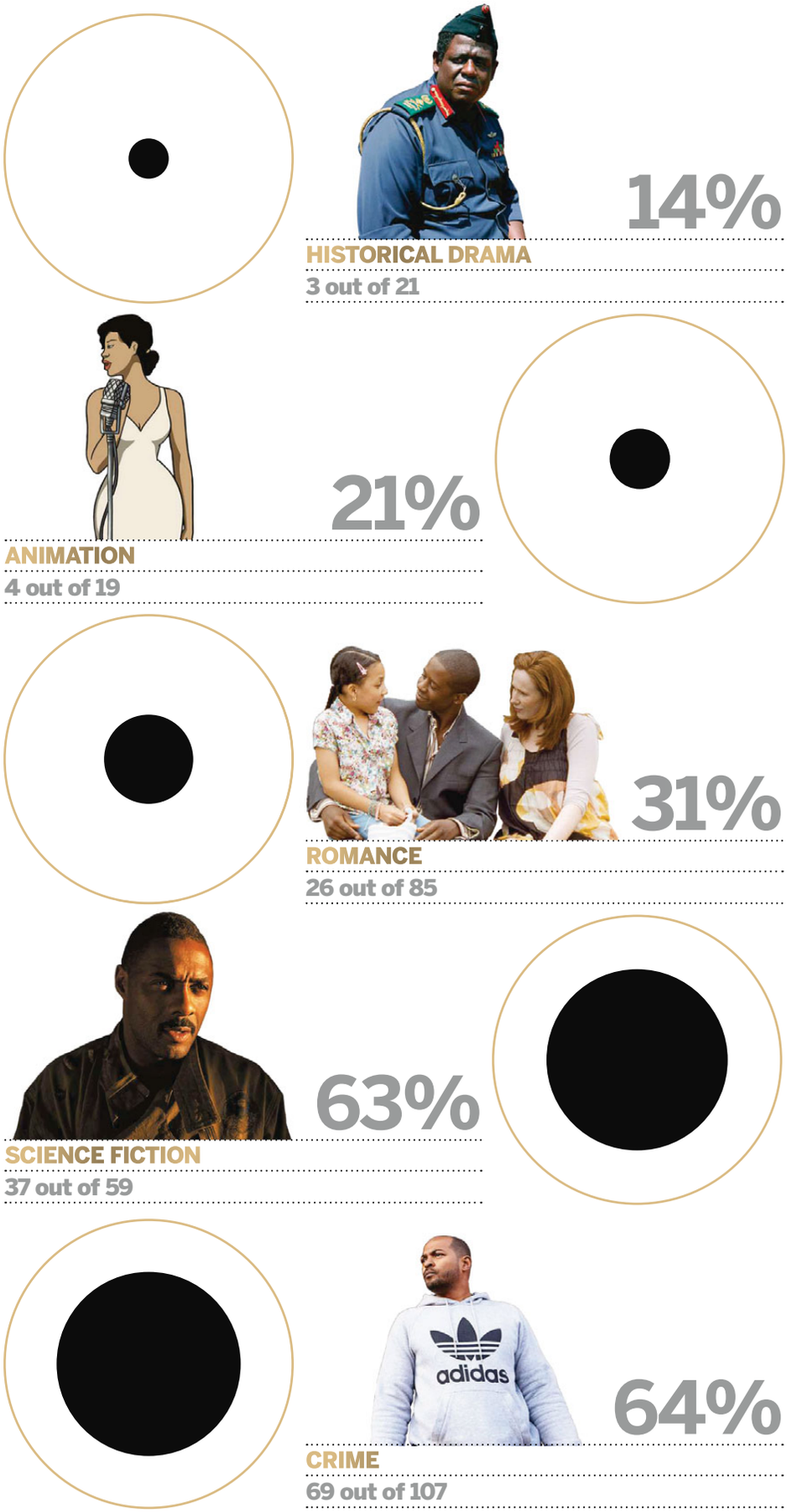
By Melanie Hoyes

The lack of recognition and reward for black actors in the film industry is a long-running scandal but debate on the topic significantly intensified this year when the Academy Awards voters failed to nominate the black talent in *Straight Outta Compton* and *Creed* (both 2015), two critically acclaimed narratives about the African American experience. That Sylvester Stallone was nominated in the Best Supporting Actor category for *Creed*, while Michael B. Jordan's stellar turn as the lead was overlooked, only rubbed salt into the wound. Many industry players spoke out and boycotted the ceremony, with the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite flooding social media.

As Viola Davis said in her speech last year, when she became the first African American woman to win the Emmy for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series, "The only thing that separates women of colour from everyone else is opportunity... You cannot win an Emmy for roles that are simply not there." #OscarsSoWhite would suggest that this lack of opportunity extends more generally. If the situation is bad in the States, what does it say about the environment in the UK that a host of our own black actors have left to work in Hollywood? As David Oyelowo, who moved to Los Angeles in 2007, has said, "If I looked like Benedict [Cumberbatch] or Eddie Redmayne, I could do the films they have done that are being celebrated now. But myself, Idris Elba and Chiwetel Ejiofor had to gain our success elsewhere because there is not a desire to tell stories with black protagonists in a heroic context within British film."

It's clear, then, that from an actor's perspective, the UK film industry has failed to make enough films that reflect and/or represent the multicultural make-up of the country – estimated by the 2011 census to be 7.5 per cent Asian or Asian British, and 3.3 per cent black or black British – or do enough to increase the diversity of its workforce. But to what extent is our understanding based on the assumed knowledge and incomplete

NUMBER OF UK GENRE FILMS FEATURING BLACK ACTORS, 2006-16



analysis inherent in the imperfect and patchy existing histories of UK film? And how can we improve our understanding in such a way that, over the long-term, the record of ethnic diversity in film can be transformed?

The BFI is undertaking a research project to provide concrete data that will offer some clarity and context for these questions. Starting with a sample drawn from the most recent ten years, from 1 January 2006 to the end of August this year, a list of UK films has been drawn up in order to establish the proportional number of black actors in lead and supporting roles. In this context, 'UK films' were defined as fiction films of 40 minutes or longer, which were released theatrically in the UK by a member of the Film Distributors' Association and produced or funded in full or in part by a UK-based company. This means that as well as obvious candidates such as *Adulthood* (2008), the data also includes the likes of *American Gangster* (2007) and *Selma* (2014). It is hoped that this sample will provide a substantial indicator of the true state of diversity in the UK film industry for film historians, critics, academics and researchers to interrogate, providing a catalyst for change and improvement. The BFI's film-funding, policy-making and cultural competencies make it the best organisation to provide an overview of the landscape of film development, production, distribution, reception and heritage.

Of the 1,171 British films released from 2006-16, 475 featured at least one black actor in a lead or supporting role, around 40 per cent of the total. Many of these actors have been relatively prolific throughout their careers, with 70 of the 897 actors appearing in five or more UK films.

However, when you break these figures down to investigate how substantial these roles are, the picture changes considerably. Of around 45,000 roles credited to actors in the UK over this period, only 217 were lead roles played by black actors, which means only 0.5 per cent were black leads. In fact, you would only need to watch 47 films to catch 50 per cent of all these performances. Only 14 actors from the sample have played more than two lead roles in this period, five of whom are women. Furthermore, only four black actors appear in our list of the 100 most prolific actors in UK films over the last decade – Noel Clarke, Nonso Anozie, Jumayn Hunter and Ashley Walters. All of this seems to confirms Oyelowo's assertion that it is nearly impossible to play a black British lead protagonist in the cinema.

The subjects that recur most frequently where a film has a more diverse cast, are slavery, racism, apartheid, colonialism, crime and gangs

13%

The proportion of UK films – representing 155 in total – in the past decade to credit at least one black actor in a leading role

4

The number of black actors in the list of the 100 most prolific actors in UK films over the past decade

£3.3m

The box-office takings of *Brotherhood* in the UK since its release at the end of August

47

The number of UK films you would need to watch to see 50 per cent of all the lead roles played by black actors in the last 10 years

Looking at the types of roles black actors might play in films, it is perhaps unsurprising to note that the genre least likely to feature black actors is the historical drama, with around 86 per cent of the films in this period failing to feature a single black actor with a named character. Animation and romance are also under-represented, with 79 per cent of UK animation features and 69 per cent of romantic encounters not involving any black actors. On the other side of the spectrum, 64 per cent of UK crime films have found roles for black actors, with 15 per cent of all films featuring black actors in this period focused on crime narratives. Where black actors are being cast, they are mainly in stereotypical stories that pigeonhole them and limit the range and depth of possible representation. The subjects that recur most frequently where a film has a more diverse cast are slavery, racism, apartheid, colonialism, crime and gangs, with *12 Years a Slave* (2013), *Selma* and this year's *Brotherhood* all making the list of films that have cast the most black actors. It could be argued that where there are black roles, they are telling us nothing new – how great would it be to see more black British horror stars or romantic leads?

Is there really an assertion that audiences aren't interested in diverse representations or narratives? In terms of box office there appears to be no suggestion that these factors affect revenue. On average, there is less likely to be a black lead in a film with a higher budget (£10 million or more) – nine per cent of higher-budget films in this time period had a black lead, against 18 per cent in films with a budget of less than £500,000. Lower-budget films are more likely to have lower box-office takings (due to their lower marketing budgets etc), so though the data may suggest black leads are less likely to result in higher box-office takings, those figures are likely to be misleading as that's probably the result of them having less financial backing to succeed in the first place.

The issue here is how to increase the diversity in our narratives in order to appeal to audience tastes we are failing to serve. Noel Clarke is highest on our list of most prolific black actors in the UK, with eight lead roles to his name, and he also writes, directs and produces many of the films in which he stars. His latest offering, *Brotherhood*, completes a trilogy of films where he has done just that. Since its release at the end of August, it has made more than £3.3 million at the box office, dispelling the myth that there is no audience for more diverse stories. Noel has often spoken about how he feels "massively disrespected" by the film

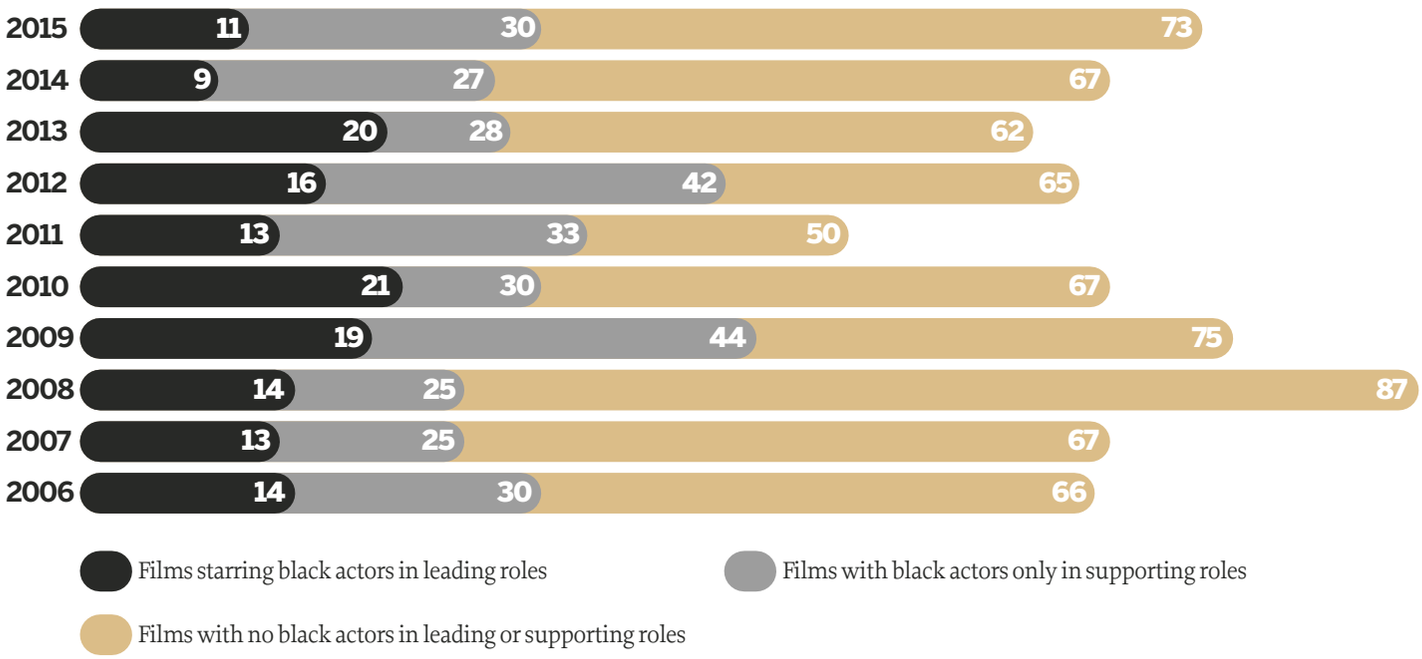
industry. He talks about having to take on all these roles in order to get his stories on screen and give the opportunity for diverse audiences to see themselves represented within them: "Everything I create will always be diverse because that's what I see, that's my life, that's how I grew up. ... [my audience] can look at people like Stormzy and Tinie [Tempah] and Dizzee [Rascal] and they can think, 'We can achieve.' When I was growing up I could barely look at anyone who made me believe I could achieve."

This research is still at a very early stage, with more work to do to provide a larger, more detailed sample of data. What the research doesn't encompass is television and theatre, only providing a snapshot of the landscape of acting roles in the UK for black actors. The BFI is looking at forming partnerships with other organisations in these areas to continue to enhance the data and our understanding of these issues across the arts.

We need to stop seeing 'diversity' as something to work towards but recognise that we live in a diverse society and capture it as such

Representation seems to be the key to forging changes in our film industry. We need to stop seeing 'diversity' as something to work towards but recognise that we live in a diverse society and capture it as such. To slightly adapt a comment Geena Davis made at her symposium about gender in film at last year's BFI London Film Festival: if you can see it, you can be it. This data paints a true picture of diversity in our recent moving image history and offers us better ways of being.

NUMBER OF UK FILMS WITH AND WITHOUT BLACK ACTORS BY YEAR, 2006-15



BRITISH ACTORS WITH MOST LEAD ROLES IN UK FILMS

Noel Clarke	8
Ashley Walters	7
Naomie Harris	6
Thandie Newton	5
Idris Elba	4
Chiwetel Ejiofor	3
Bashy	2
Carmen Ejogo	2
Lucien Laviscount	2
Gugu Mbatha-Raw	2
Roger Nsengiyumva	2
Sophie Okonedo	2
Femi Oyeniran	2
Colin Salmon	2

UK FILMS WITH THE MOST BLACK ACTORS

Selma (2014)	23
12 Years a Slave (2013)	21
Son of Man (aka Jezile, 2006)	20
Half of a Yellow Sun (2012)	19
Baggage Claim (2013)	16
Honeytrap (2014)	16
American Gangster (2007)	16
It's a Lot (2013)	15
1 Day (2009)	15
Brotherhood (2016)	14
Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom (2013)	14
Fast Girls (2012)	13
Adulthood (2008)	13
Death at a Funeral (2010)	13

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DESPERATE MEASURES

The Kafkaesque labyrinth of Britain's welfare system and the faceless inhumanity of its employees form the backdrop of Ken Loach's powerful Palme d'Or-winning 'I, Daniel Blake', an indignant dramatisation of the very real human cost of austerity

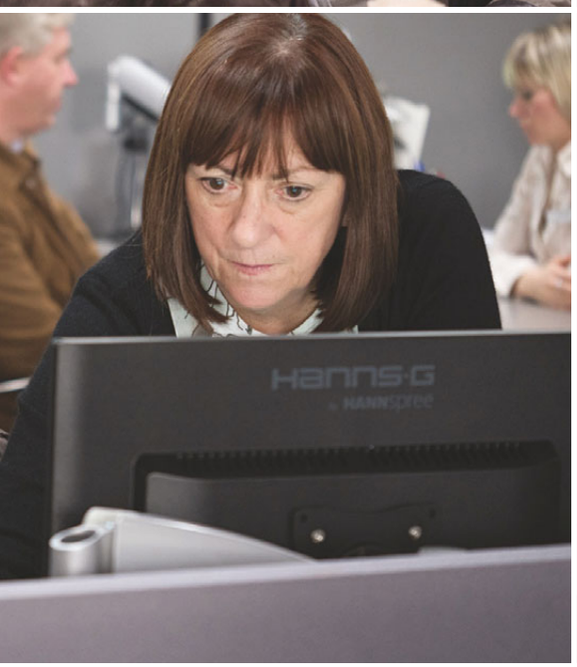
By Trevor Johnston

The talking-point scene in *I, Daniel Blake*, the film which won Ken Loach his second Palme d'Or just a few weeks before his 80th birthday in June, starts with the two central characters joining a lengthy queue outside a Newcastle church hall. Middle-aged Daniel (played by northern comic Dave Johns) is there to give a bit of support to twentysomething Katie (Hayley Squires), a South London single mum who's been rehoused with her two kids by her local authority, displacing them hundreds of miles away to Tyneside where rents are cheaper. Widower Dave has befriended her after a chance meeting at a welfare office, where he's been making a claim after his doctor declared him unfit for work in the wake of a heart attack. Now they are lined up outside a local food bank, which, given Katie's fruitless struggle to find work in her new surroundings, provides an immediate solution to the problem of finding food to feed her children.

So far, so typical of Loach's 12-feature collaboration with screenwriter Paul Laverty, much of which has peered into the nitty-gritty of ordinary lives in various contemporary British cities, exploring the pressures that subsistence places on moral well-being. Even by their standards, *I, Daniel Blake* is a particularly unglamorous tale, much of it taking place in functional government buildings as Johns's title character negotiates the obstacle course marked out by Employment and Support Allowance and Job Seeker's Allowance, or gets an earful of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* while hanging endlessly on the departmental helpline. When he and the apparently fiercely resilient Katie make it inside the food bank itself though, the whole mood of the film lifts significantly. Here are shelves filled with tins of this and that, household and toiletry items, all donated by kindly suppliers, and the ladies who run the place can't do enough to help. Loach's facility for seamlessly blending his actors with non-professionals is spot-on here, as the very nice woman leads Squires around, loading her with daily necessities, while the camera looks on benevolently.

There's such comfort in this outbreak of communal goodwill, that at first we barely notice Squires slipping a ring-pull tin out of the carrier bag, and turning her back on us. Before we know it, she's wolfing down cold baked beans, the brutal imperative of sheer hunger outweighing the shame of letting herself down in public. There were gasps of shock and also sympathy in the London press screening I saw, a response prompted by the urgent truth of the material, but also shaped by the patient, slow build of the direction over the course of the entire sequence. Loach's crucial decision not to cut to a full close-up of the poor woman chowing down

FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS
In Ken Loach's *I, Daniel Blake*, widower Dave, played by Dave Johns (opposite, middle left), befriends Hayley Squires's Katie (bottom left), a South London single mum who's been rehoused with her two kids on Tyneside


HANNS·G

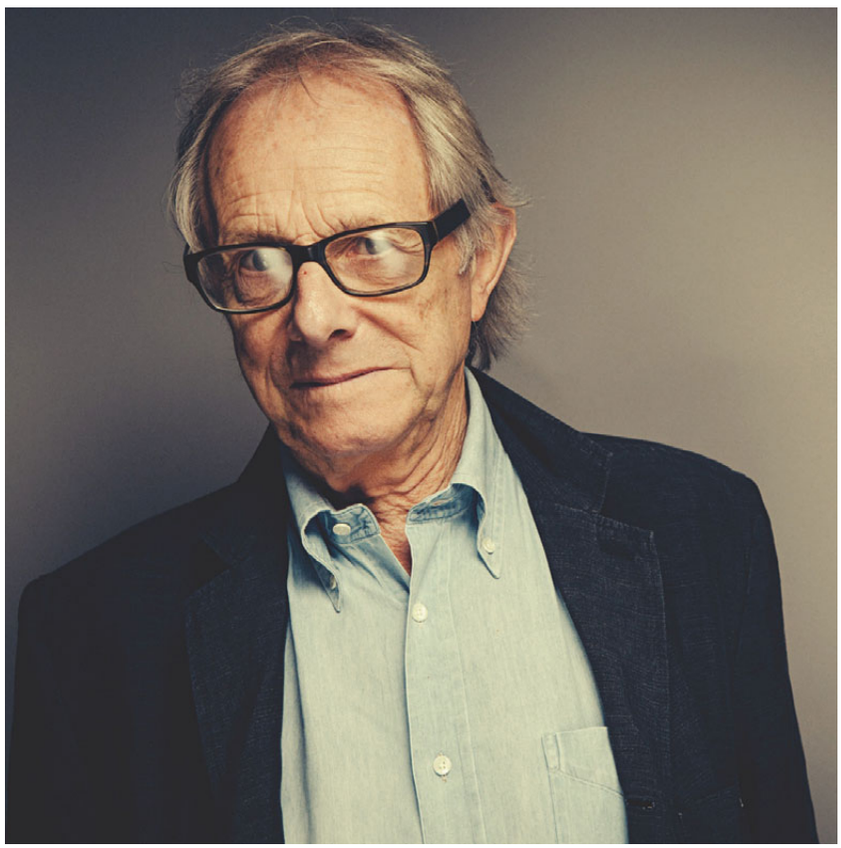
the food, and instead keeping a more respectful distance, ultimately gets the point across that her loss of basic dignity is actually what cuts the deepest.

Whether you applaud Loach for confronting the uncomfortable human cost of the austerity era's straitened welfare budget, or suspect him of using emotional armtwisting to enforce a certain political agenda, such sequences exemplify the very special combination of what he brings to the screen – a deeply felt commitment to the socially marginalised, added to a filmmaking technique whose apparent transparency somehow underplays its underlying mastery of camera placement, rhythm and sheer you-are-there believability. Trouble is, Loach has been the keeper of the flame for social-realist cinema for so long that, particularly at home, he is ever so slightly taken for granted. Broadly, we know the style; broadly, we know the subject matter; broadly, we know what we're going to get.

That complacent analysis does a disservice to the variety in the Loach-Laverty body of work, given its forays into caper comedy (*The Angels' Share*, 2012), dramatic whimsy (*Looking for Eric*, 2009), conspiracy thriller (*Route Irish*, 2010), not to mention its ventures abroad (Nicaragua in *Carla's Song*, 1996; Los Angeles in *Bread and Roses*, 2000) and its perspective on Irish history too (*The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, 2006; *Jimmy's Hall*, 2014). Yet there's a highly focused confrontational directness about *I, Daniel Blake* which gives it a contentious, edgy topicality not shared by all of their recent output. The film's Cannes victory seems to have been greeted by the critical community with pretty much a collective shrug, since most of them were rooting for Maren Ade's *Toni Erdmann* to take home the silverware, yet its distinct fierceness of purpose shows a director decidedly reinvigorated even as he reaches what should realistically be the closing chapters in an extraordinary half-century of accomplishment.

Not that the spry and engaging older gent who greets me at the Soho office of Sixteen Films, the production company Loach set up with producer Rebecca O'Brien, gives the remotest impression that he's ready for the bath-chair and tartan blanket any time soon, but he's also attuned to the fact that interviews these days do sometimes involve as much looking back as looking forward. I start off by suggesting that even though Squires's role in the new film is there as a complement to the plight of the central character, there's something in her performance's toughness and vulnerability which echoes the put-upon young mum played by Carol White in *Cathy Come Home*, the 1966 BBC play which caused an almighty rumpus in its day. Fifty years apart, here are two films in which state bureaucracy impacts negatively on the individuals it's supposedly supporting – what's changed between those two points?

"Oh, a lot. A lot's changed," Loach says. "Back then there was the abiding notion of doing things for the public good; people would help each other, and society was about trying to make the world a better place. Now, after Thatcher and Blair, the consciousness is, 'I'll look after myself, you're on your own, pal.' Public ownership has by and large gone, so the free market and the rights of corporations now dominate in a way they never did before. Individualism has essentially trumped the common good. You've now got Richard Branson providing healthcare – what's that all about?"



PHOTOGRAPHY BY FABRIZIO MALTESE

We deliberately chose not to dramatise the most extreme cases we found. We just wanted a story about a normal bloke, not addicted to anything – could be you or me

That, in a nutshell, is the same analysis Loach laid out in his 2012 documentary *The Spirit of '45*, which hails the values and achievements of the post-war Attlee administration in creating the welfare state and initiating public ownership to prevent the battered nation slipping back into the poverty and inequity of pre-1939 Britain – and then goes on to compare it with the post-Thatcher drive towards a smaller state and faith in the market to provide for all. That binary opposition also plays out within the narrative of *I, Daniel Blake* – a little too obviously for some critics – in which Daniel's efforts to help out Katie and her kids, not to mention his own good multicultural neighbours and the volunteers at the food bank, present a vision of community in adversity in very marked contrast to the approach by Department of Work and Pensions staff, seemingly fuelled by objectives of discipline and control to isolate individuals like Daniel who've been paying into the welfare system for decades of their working life.

It's tempting to wonder if one film actually grew out of the other, an idea quickly dismissed by Laverty when I talk to him a few days later. "Nah, it never came up," he says with a shrug. "I talk to Ken all the time, he's my mate, and things are a lot more organic than that. The actual starting point was that we both got completely fascinated by the huge difference between perception and reality when it comes to changing narratives about the welfare state. There was a poll where they asked the public about the level of fraudulent benefit claims, and people reckoned it was 30 per cent. The reality is less than one per cent, and the financial figures are absolutely dwarfed by the levels of unpaid taxes. Yet in the newspapers and TV, and just generally out there in society, it's all 'strivers versus skivers', and a massive prejudice against

people who happen to be out of work. So, Ken and I started visiting places and talking to people to see what the real story was."

At which point it's appropriate to recall that Laverty actually started out as a lawyer who spent three years in Nicaragua in the mid-1980s documenting human rights abuses perpetrated by the US-backed Contras. Those experiences fed into his first screenplay, *Carla's Song*, which led to a sustained collaboration with Loach founded on the same basic process of spending time in the field and bringing injustices to light. Speak to both of them and what they really want to talk about are the people they've encountered and what they've been through. The reasons for making something like *I, Daniel Blake* appear to fire them up rather more than any particular curlicues of the film itself. So, in turn, Loach tells me about the teenager in Nuneaton surviving on scraps of cash-in-hand work and going hungry several days a week because he can't face the humiliation of applying for benefits, while Laverty reads me out an internal Department of Work and Pensions memo (sent by one of a number of whistleblowers who made contact with him) making clear that they're well aware of the health deterioration likely for both healthy and disabled applicants if they're left without funds for everyday basics.

"If you were making a doc, it could have been a real horror show," contends Loach. "We deliberately chose not to dramatise the most extreme cases. We just wanted a story about a normal bloke, not addicted to anything – could be you or me – who's just had a heart attack. His doctor says he's not fit for work, but the DWP says he hasn't scored enough points, so [as far as the state is concerned] he is. Essentially, their attitude is about putting the blame on the claimants for not having a job."

Adds Laverty: "But once you've gathered all this information, the challenge is knowing where to place it in a narrative. Trying to make bureaucracy dramatically interesting is a bit of a nightmare, so all I can say is, 'Thank fuck for Vivaldi.' All these poor folk being driven absolutely crazy by Vivaldi when they're put on hold, and apparently it's the same for the DWP staff themselves on internal calls. Thankfully that gave us some surreal comedy in the midst of this Kafkaesque labyrinth, which is what you need. As a writer you're very grateful for such gifts."

OFFICE POLITICS (Below from left) Dave Johns, screenwriter Paul Laverty and Ken Loach on the set of *I, Daniel Blake*, much of which takes place in functional government buildings such as this

These little jewel-like moments of observation, which include Johns's budget-savvy tips for putting candles inside a plant pot to make an impromptu heater and sticking bubble-wrap over the windows by way of insulation, certainly help build a sense of veracity, but as so often with Loach it's the truthfulness of the performances which help seal the emotional deal – shaped by his longstanding approach of carefully drip-feeding his actors the script as they shoot, so their work remains instinctive and spontaneous. "It was early experiences at the BBC which made me change my way of working. You'd rehearse the actors and then poke a couple of cameras at it on set, like filmed theatre. The cast were always so much fresher at the start than at the end. So going out on location for the first time with *Up the Junction* [1965] and *Cathy Come Home* helped us forget all that. It turned the filmmaking process into a journey of discovery. What are we going to find out today?"

The fruits of such collective labour are certainly on display in an unexpectedly moving scene in which Squires's young mum sends her daughter off to bed, then has a wee cry on the stairs, the sheer pressure of her parental responsibilities simply pouring out of her. "Shooting in sequence really helps," Loach explains. "Hayley had already done some work meeting with mothers in hostels and getting to know what it was like for them. Then she came up to Newcastle, didn't know anyone here – and so she enters the story. I didn't need to say anything to her. She just had to live it. If you make that truthful, it should transcend propaganda. It goes beyond the benefits system being cruel, it's about how we are with one another."

Mention of that word 'propaganda', so often used by Loach's detractors, also gets Laverty slightly riled. "If you're authentic to your environment, it's hard for audiences not to be empathetic. It touches on emotion, it touches on intellect, it touches on community, it touches on anger. And there's nothing manipulative about it, because we didn't make this stuff up. We didn't make it up that people are selling their furniture to pay the bills. Anyone who criticises that for being over-emotional needs to get out there and see what's really going on in this country."

Adds Loach: "What keeps you going is that desire to express something about the world as you understand it. It's much more complicated than anger. It's why people write, why they paint, why they take photographs. You want to communicate."

While Loach has intimated that the physical stresses of shooting are starting to get a bit too much for him, his words and the quiet intensity with which they're delivered don't entirely sound like he's resigned to hanging up his viewfinder. If that should be the case, *I, Daniel Blake*, in its final declaration of the individual's right to dignity offers a worthy, emblematic closer to an extraordinary career. Laverty, though, isn't so sure. "I want Ken to do what he wants, but he just has this extraordinary curiosity. He's been going off to meetings each night after work, and it's the fact he has so many interests outside film which makes him such a great filmmaker. The man still has energy to burn. He's like a greyhound after his grub."

***I, Daniel Blake* is released in UK cinemas on 21 October and is reviewed on page 75**

NOT FADE AWAY: ROBERT ALDRICH IN THE 1970S

The sheer variety of work the director undertook in the 1960s suggests a man looking for something new to engage him and an artist whose career was winding down – giving no hint that the following decade would see him turn out some of his finest films

By Brad Stevens

APOCALYPSE NOW
In *Twilight's Last Gleaming* (1977), Burt Lancaster plays a well-meaning Air Force general determined to expose a secret government document that gives the real reason for the Vietnam War

As time goes by, the 1970s looks more than ever like a golden age of American cinema, not just because relative newcomers such as Robert Altman, Francis Ford Coppola, Bob Rafelson and Martin Scorsese were creating impressive bodies of work but also because of the older directors whose careers were invigorated. Richard Brooks, Don Siegel and Richard Fleischer, who had started in the 1940s or early 1950s and established themselves as reliable servants of the studio system, suddenly started turning out films vitally connected to the tumultuous change the country was undergoing.

Robert Aldrich (1918-83) is one of this group's key figures. His early experiences of filmmaking included working as an assistant director for Charles Chaplin, Jean Renoir and Max Ophuls. His first feature, the baseball drama *Big Leaguer*, was released in 1953, and he soon began attracting critical attention, especially in France: the MacMahonists, a Paris-based cult of cinephiles who had little truck with notions of respectability, granted him a privileged position in their pantheon. Aldrich's most important film from this early period was *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), an adaptation of one of Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer novels, which took an explicitly critical view of its source material, situating itself in opposition to the politics of the McCarthy era and pushing *noir*'s already stylised visual tropes into areas of abstraction and delirium.

Although Aldrich's 1960s output was often distinctive, and occasionally financially successful (*The Dirty Dozen*, 1967, enabled him to create his own short-lived studio), its variety suggested a director desperately searching for something new to engage his attention: a Biblical epic (*Sodom and Gomorrah*, 1962), a comedy western (*4 for Texas*, 1963), and vehicles for ageing female performers (*What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*, 1962; *Hush... Hush, Sweet Charlotte*, 1964). There were many reasons to consider Aldrich an artist whose career was winding down, and little to hint at the extraordinary work he would do in the following decade.

As his finest achievements of the 1950s indicate, Aldrich is at his best when reacting against something. His first film of the 1970s, *The Grissom Gang* (1971), an adaptation of James Hadley Chase's *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*, makes this point rather neatly. Superficially, it appears to belong to the nostalgia cycle that began with Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and included such disparate titles as Peter Bogdanovich's *Paper Moon* (1973), Jack Clayton's *The Great Gatsby* (1974), John Schlesinger's *The Day of the Locust* (1975) and Martin Scorsese's *New York, New York* (1977). The popularity of these films implied an ambivalence on the part of cinemagoers towards the profound shifts America was experiencing; and while they frequently stressed ideological tensions, they nonetheless used *mise en scène* and, crucially, music – the ragtime melodies of George Roy Hill's *The Sting* (1973), the rock 'n' roll tracks of George Lucas's *American Graffiti* (1973) – to evoke a fondly remembered past. *The Grissom Gang*'s attitude to the past could hardly be more different: the landscapes and people of 1931 are made as ugly as possible; the dominant tone is of melodramatic excess, evoking a frenzied nightmare rather than an age recalled in tranquility. Unlike *Bonnie and Clyde*, too, it refuses to favour either of its opposed groups – the eponymous outlaws and the family of the heiress they

Anyone hoping to comprehend where we are and how we got here, politically and aesthetically, should pay respectful attention to 'Twilight's Last Gleaming'

kidnap – instead depicting the over-privileged and under-privileged as mirror images of each other.

If Aldrich intuitively resisted cinematic trends, his anti-establishment politics needed to be reconfigured in a decade when resistance to the establishment had become the norm. *Emperor of the North Pole* (1973), a 1930s-set drama about the conflict between hobos attempting to ride a train for free and the vicious railroad conductor determined to stop them; and *The Longest Yard* (1974), a crowd-pleasing action-comedy about an American football match in a prison, pit representatives of rugged individualism against the forces of harsh conformism in an endless cycle of violent repression followed by violent resistance, and might easily belong with the director's 1960s output. But his three finest achievements of the 1970s – *Ulzana's Raid* (1972), *Hustle* (1975) and *Twilight's Last Gleaming* (1977) – function quite differently. In each of these films, the central characters are confronted by a crisis in relation to which no solution is adequate, no position can be affirmed, and no stance can be taken that is not implicated in the overall corruption. This is also the structure of *Kiss Me Deadly* and the underrated *Ten Seconds to Hell* (1958), about a group of German ex-soldiers working in bomb disposal in post-war Berlin. In an interview published in Richard Combs's 1978 BFI book *Robert Aldrich*, the director said: "There is no room for purity at either end of the spectrum. To survive you have to operate somewhere between the purity of the idealistic innocents at both ends. You're not going to get through the game if you don't find some middle ground." Yet *Ulzana's Raid*, *Hustle* and *Twilight's Last Gleaming* remorselessly demonstrate the impossibility of locating a middle ground: those who search for it find nothing but death.

Hustle is the only one of the three to have a clear-cut protagonist, a police lieutenant, Phil Gaines (Burt Reynolds), whose routine investigation into a young woman's suicide exposes structural injustices (political corruption, a police force that gives privileged treatment to influential individuals) which cannot be resolved in the terms proposed by that system of law and order he is sworn to uphold. In *Ulzana's Raid*, on the other hand, identification is divided among several individuals who represent various positions in the battle between civilisation and savagery, the two extremes (which, as in *The Grissom Gang*, are shown to be different sides of the same coin) being embodied by Lieutenant DeBuin (Bruce Davison), a spokesman for Christian charity; and Ulzana (Joaquin Martinez), a renegade Apache who, after leaving the reservation, sets about killing every white person he encounters. Standing between DeBuin and Ulzana is the army scout McIntosh (Burt Lancaster), whose attempt to understand each side while remaining morally detached from both initially seems to have the film's sympathy, but is ultimately shown to be delusional: like Lieutenant Gaines in *Hustle*, McIntosh cannot take effective action without abandoning the role he has assumed as a paid representative of one of the opposed factions.

If Aldrich intuitively resisted cinematic trends, his anti-establishment politics needed to be reconfigured in a decade when resistance to the establishment had become the norm

It is the need to take such action that animates *Twilight's Last Gleaming*, in which Lancaster again appears, this time as a former Air Force general, Lawrence Dell, who threatens to plunge the world into destruction by launching nine nuclear missiles unless US president David Stevens (Charles Durning) makes public a secret document. Stevens is portrayed as a well-meaning man who is genuinely shocked by this document, which reveals precisely why the Vietnam War took place; but in his desire to tackle the problem while remaining faithful to the system he represents, he proves no less impotent than Gaines or McIntosh. Yet Dell's project, rooted in naive assumptions about the sanctity of the presidency, is also doomed to failure, and although the film is unable to directly propose the need for fundamental changes based on communal rather than individual activism, it

CRISIS MANAGEMENT (Clockwise from bottom left) Lee Marvin in *Emperor of the North Pole* (1973), *The Grissom Gang* (1971), and Burt Reynolds and Catherine Deneuve in *Hustle* (1975)

BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (2)

nonetheless dramatises the need for such changes in no uncertain terms.

If *The Grissom Gang* was in disputation with the nostalgia cycle, *Twilight's Last Gleaming* has a similar relationship with the inherently conservative disaster genre. Indeed, by linking the threatened disaster with both the Vietnam War and America's nuclear stand-off with Soviet Russia, Aldrich stirs up precisely the fears this genre existed to assuage. But not only does this remarkable work anticipate the soon-to-emerge series of films focused on Vietnam, it also formulates a penetrating critique of their assumptions. The most popular American narratives dealing with this conflict tended to be non-specific in terms of their politics. The Vietnam war of Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986) feels little different from World War II, while the idea of war as a form of organised insanity to which Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) is dedicated is even more timeless. There was, of course, widespread opposition to this particular campaign, something these films are occasionally obliged to acknowledge, but the precise nature of the mass protests against what was extensively perceived to be a war of imperialism is usually subsumed into a series of variations on a theme – 'War is hell!' – to which even the most rabid right-wing patriot would have little objection. This tactic is represented in all its banality by Jon Voight's speech at the end of Hal Ashby's *Coming Home* (1978): "I have killed for my country or whatever. And I don't feel good about it. Because there's not enough reason, man. To feel a person die in your hands or to see your best buddy get blown away. I'm here to tell you, it's a lousy thing, man. I don't see any reason for it."

The audacity of *Twilight's Last Gleaming* becomes clearer in this context, since it proposes that there was indeed a 'reason' for Vietnam. The document Dell is determined to have made public reveals that the war was initiated as a "theatrical holocaust" which would demonstrate a "brutal national will", thus convincing the Russians that America was capable of perpetrating acts of mindless cruelty in its struggle to defeat communism. What renders this accusation all the more remarkable is that Aldrich manages to make it within the framework of a popular thriller. If there is one characteristic which distinguishes the 'second wind' directors of the 1970s from their New Hollywood counterparts, it is the unadorned quality of their imagery. Whereas Altman and Coppola self-consciously imported artistic strategies associated with European auteurs (Bergman, Bertolucci, Fellini and Antonioni were the decisive influences), the older filmmakers favoured plainer, more conventional visuals; it is difficult to imagine anything more pared-down than *Hustle*, which superficially resembles a routine television movie.

Yet this apparent lack of stylistic ambition, which at the time consigned several fine directors to critical limbo, now looks more like an allegiance to a form of popular American filmmaking already on the verge of extinction. Of course, the term 'popular American filmmaking' must be carefully qualified before it can be applied to *Twilight's Last Gleaming*, which, in terms of box-office receipts, was spectacularly unpopular; it's not even really American, being a West German co-production shot mainly in Bavaria. But Aldrich's fidelity to a narrative tradition in which radical political content is accessibly conveyed to as wide an audience as possible is what makes *Twilight's Last Gleaming* so notable – particularly since it was released in the year that *Star Wars* pointed Hollywood in a very different direction.

HIGH PLAINS DRIFTER
Burt Lancaster as an army scout who is caught in an impossible position between 'civilisation' and 'savagery' in Aldrich's revisionist western *Ulzana's Raid* (1972)

Aldrich's three subsequent films – the police drama *The Choirboys* (1977), another comedy western, *The Frisco Kid* (1979), and a light comedy about female wrestlers, *...All the Marbles* (1981) – though not without interest, are clearly the work of someone who knows that the game is over. Most of Aldrich's directing contemporaries played out their careers in a similar fashion, with Don Siegel retiring after the desultory *Rough Cut* (1980) and *Jinxed!* (1982), and Richard Fleischer making a series of trivial entertainments in the 1980s. Only Richard Brooks, drawing on those reserves of contempt constantly lurking beneath the surface of his *oeuvre*, came up with a late masterpiece, *Wrong Is Right* (1982), a bitter political satire which dismisses American culture as nothing more than a bad joke. Aldrich, for better or worse, would have been incapable of making such a film, since his clear-sighted cynicism was supported by an underlying assumption that if nothing can be saved from the wreckage, this is a cause more for lament than celebration. This is what distinguishes him from his closest equivalent in the American cinema of the 1980s, William Friedkin, whose *Cruising* (1980) and *To Live and Die in L.A.* (1985) share many of Aldrich's characteristics while lacking his underlying humanism.

It is, perhaps, too soon to write off popular American cinema of the sort Aldrich, Fleischer, Siegel and Brooks represented: Quentin Tarantino's *The Hateful Eight* (2015) and Clint Eastwood's *American Sniper* (2014), both of which present difficult questions as more important than easy answers, suggest there is at least something still going on, however marginal it may be. But to watch *Twilight's Last Gleaming* now is to see the road not taken. Anyone hoping to comprehend where we are and how we got here, politically and aesthetically, should pay it respectful attention.

i ***Twilight's Last Gleaming* is available on DVD and Blu-ray from Eureka/Masters of Cinema on 21 November**

FRENCH FILM NOIR

Although *noir* is usually credited as an American phenomenon, its distinct style can be discerned in French film from the early 1930s. Tapping into a French literary tradition that had long been infatuated with those living on the margins, and absorbing contemporary trends in visual arts, the emerging *noir* cinema internalised the traumas and anxieties of French society – from the rise of fascism to the Nazi occupation to the American-inflected modernity of the 1950s – and offers a fascinating window on to the shifting power dynamics in French society. By **Ginette Vincendeau**

Any discussion of French *film noir* must begin by challenging a few myths. Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton's seminal *A Panorama of American Film Noir*, first published in 1955, sees *film noir* – despite the French name – as an American phenomenon. French attempts are dismissed as imitation and confined to the post-war period. In a remarkable case of cultural amnesia that overlooks France's contribution to the genre, the French critic Nino Frank is credited with coining the phrase in 1946, in the excitement of discovering a batch of Hollywood *noir* movies banned during the war. Another legend sees the expression '*film noir*' originating in the Gallimard Série noire imprint of crime novels, founded by Marcel Duhamel in 1945. Yet, as the film critic and theorist André Bazin noted, "In French pre-war cinema, even if there wasn't exactly a genre, there was a style, the realist *film noir*," referring to films that critics such as Frank had named as such before the war. For instance, a review of Pierre Chenal's *Le Dernier Tournant* (*The Last Turn*, 1939) – the first adaptation of James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* – states: "Here is another *film noir*, which belongs to the sinister series which starts with *Les Bas-fonds* and *Crime et châtiment* and continues with *Pépé le Moko* and *Le Quai des brumes*, *La Bête humaine* and *Hôtel du Nord*. No doubt this series has produced the most significant French films of the last few years."

The importance and impact of American *film noir* are of course not in question. Nevertheless, as the above suggests, and scholarship now amply demonstrates, a powerful current that merits the adjective '*noir*' runs through French cinema. Many of the films are famous in their own right. Some are regarded as part of a movement known as poetic realism: dark, melodramatic films that fuse two apparent opposites – a 'realistic' description of working-class lives with a poetic, or lyrical, style. (Pierre Chenal's 1934 *La Rue sans nom* is the first film to be called as such, and the movement's greatest classics are probably Marcel Carné's *Le Quai des brumes* in 1938 and *Le Jour se lève* in 1939.) Other titles are famous as the work of filmmakers known for their proclivity for dark subjects and style (Henri-Georges Clouzot, Jean-Pierre Melville). But longer and deeper continuities sustain the persistence of *noir* in French film, which will be examined here in its heyday, from the early 1930s to the late 1960s.

Although the phenomenon was not confined to France, French writers showed a strong attraction to the underbelly of society, the '*bas-fonds*' ('lower depths'), from the early modern period onwards and in particular in the 18th-century *roman noir*, examining those living on the margins of the big cities, the poor and the criminals. This first culminated in the 19th century in the aftermath of the French Revolution and against the background of urbanisation and capitalism, with a particular focus on Paris. A supreme early expression was Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1831), soon followed by many novelists (Honoré de Balzac, Eugène Sue), journalists and campaigners, and even a criminal turned chief of police, Eugène François Vidocq. It is no accident that Edgar Allan Poe located his short story 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' (1841, credited as the first detective story) in Paris; in turn, it gave rise to a long tradition of international crime literature to which all *film noir* is directly or indirectly indebted.

Meanwhile, the late 19th century saw a fundamental shift in attitudes to the *bas-fonds* from revulsion to fascination. This was in part due to the Romantics and their love of bohemia. They continued to be fascinated by the poverty, vice and crime that defined representations of the urban lower depths, but they observed it with a greater poetic – and increasingly, nostalgic – sensibility. Such attitudes are in evidence in the work of a number of 20th-century French-language writers who produced key texts for French *film noir*, among them Pierre Mac Orlan, the author of *Le Quai des brumes*, who coined the phrase 'social fantastic', a precursor of 'poetic realism'. Mac Orlan and others, such as Francis Carco and Eugène Dabit, were close to the so-called populist literature of the 1920s that focused on the working classes, but which were not untouched by crime. Concurrently, crime literature thrived; particularly influential were two Belgian writers, Stanislas-André Steeman and, especially, Georges Simenon. Their novels explored all backgrounds, with a predilection for the teeming *faubourgs* of Paris and low dives in the port towns of Le Havre or Marseille. For decades to come, Simenon would prove one of the richest single sources of *noir* stories, both for his 'hard novels' in which crime is located in the everyday, and for his *policiers* featuring the solid, pipe-smoking Inspector Maigret. Two early Maigret adaptations, Jean Renoir's *La Nuit du carrefour* (*Night at the Crossroads*, 1932) and Julien Duvivier's *La Tête d'un homme* (1933) set the tone for a certain social voyeurism and the ambiguous intermingling of criminals and law-abiding citizens against picturesque mean streets.

From different corners of high and low literature, this interest in the dark corners of French society proved highly successful (extending also to popular song) and provides part of the cultural background that eventually led to French *film noir*. But the migration of these motifs to French cinema only came about through developments in photography and cinematography that

Although dark melodramas and crime cinema existed in the silent period, French film noir proper began with the coming of sound

GETTY IMAGES (1)

Gentleman thief: Jean Servais in Jules Dassin's *Rififi* (1955), which elegantly merged the traditions of American and French *film noir*

converged in the French capital between the two world wars. Although dark melodramas and crime cinema existed in the silent period, French *film noir* proper began with the coming of sound around 1930.

The review of *Le Dernier Tournant* quoted above laments the "special atmosphere" of "characters led to destitution and death by an implacable destiny", concluding, "It seems unfortunate that the French film 'school' is represented by films which... are long poems to discouragement." While this atmosphere was indeed predicated on narratives of doom and despair, it also owed a lot to trends in visual arts that were not confined to the 'French film school'.

Paris in the 1930s was a magnet for photographers, particularly Central and Eastern European émigrés, and the attraction of the city was reinforced by the rise of the Nazi regime in Germany: André Kertész, Brassaï, Germaine Krull and François Kollar, to name the most famous, documented French society, often relishing the city's less salubrious corners. Particularly famous is Brassaï's collection *The Secret Paris of the 30s*, with its nocturnal sewage workers, barmen, pimps and prostitutes, in a dense, inky idiom. His combination of glamorous chiaroscuro, louche subjects and poetic tone was extreme. Yet its shadowy iconography and mingling of working and criminal classes found echoes in the flourishing sensationalist press of the time (eg, *Détective*, a popular weekly magazine published by Gallimard from 1928, which specialised in sensational murder enquiries and mysteries), and had clear parallels in film, notably Renoir's *La Chienne* (1931), *La Nuit du carrefour* and *La Bête humaine* (1938); Anatole Litvak's *Coeur de Lilas* (1932); Jacques Feyder's *Le Grand Jeu* (1934); Duvivier's *La Tête d'un homme*, *La Bandera* (1935) and *Pépé le Moko* (1937); Jean Grémillon's *Gueule d'amour* (1937); Carné's *Le Quai des brumes* and *Le Jour se lève*; and Chenal's *La Rue sans nom* and indeed *Le Dernier Tournant*.

It is a cliché to point to the impact of German expressionism on *film noir*, yet like all clichés it contains some truth. Many German émigrés transited via France en route to Hollywood and left an indelible mark. Some filmmakers (Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder, G.W. Pabst) stayed only briefly, but others, such as Robert Siodmak, had a greater impact (*Mister Flow*, 1936; *Mollenard*, 1938; and *Pièges*, 1939, all contain *noir* thriller elements). German directors of photography such as Curt Courant and Eugen Schüfftan worked extensively on French films, importing expressionist imagery. They also directly trained, or indirectly influenced, French colleagues such as Jules Kruger, Marc Fossard, Claude Renoir and Nicolas Hayer. Some of the most memorable *noir* images in the 1930s and beyond can be traced to German-inspired cinematography: Courant's glittering work on the murder scene in *La Bête humaine*, Schüfftan's dramatic lighting effects in *Le Quai des brumes*, and Hayer's brooding shadows from Clouzot's *Le Corbeau* (1943) to Melville's *Le Doulos* (1962). As critic Emile Vuillermoz put it in 1939, "*Noir* is currently the colour of fashion in our studios."

The precision and beauty of this type of lighting, both contrasted and diffuse, in conjunction with the remarkable sets of Lazare Meerson and Alexandre Trauner (and their disciples) defined French *film noir* by marrying an international visual style to minutely observed French decors. In the process, they imbued sordid lower-depths locations, such as the bars in *Le Grand Jeu* and *Le Quai des brumes* or the workhouse in Renoir's *Les Bas-fonds* (1936), with a poetic grandeur. In respect of this visual style, as well as in terms of subject matter and literary origins, French *film noir* in the 1930s overlaps more or less with poetic realism, even though a few poetic realist films are less easily identified as *noir*, largely because of the absence of a criminal element within them – such as Jean Vigo's *L'Atalante* (1934) – or because of their comic slant, such as Carné's *Hôtel du Nord* (1938).

The mackintosh man: Alain Delon in Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Samouraï* (1967)

The *noir* visual aesthetic continued, often in even darker mood, in post-war classical French cinema that looked back towards the pre-war films, such as Carné's *Les Portes de la nuit* (1946), Clouzot's *Quai des orfèvres* (1947) and Yves Allégret's *Une si jolie petite plage* (*Such a Pretty Little Beach*, 1948). But *noir* left poetic realism behind in gangster films, such as Jacques Becker's *Touchez pas au grisbi* (1954), and the resistance drama *Marie-Octobre* (Duvivier, 1959) and many others. The arrival of the New Wave and its taste for location shooting inevitably had an impact, yet it did not banish the glamour of night-time urban scenes – far from it, as we can see in precursors such as Melville's *Bob le flambeur* (1956) and Louis Malle's *Lift to the Scaffold* (1958), but also in the New Wave's own *noir* pastiches, such as François Truffaut's *Shoot the Pianist* (*Tirez sur le pianiste*, 1960) and Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville* (1965). Made just before colour became the norm, these *noir* tributes may be seen as the last outposts of stylish black-and-white cinematography.

Regret for the passing of the pre-war 'good old days' is pervasive, as seen in Melville's anachronistic gangster in 'Le Samouraï'

French *film noir* thus has long antecedents in written and visual representations of the *bas-fonds*, and visual characteristics informed by contemporary professional practice and geopolitical developments. Equally significant was the immediate French social background, including the rise of fascism in the 1930s, the left-wing Popular Front alliance of 1936-38, the

war and German occupation of 1940-44, and the post-war advent of American-inflected modernity. As products of popular culture, French *films noirs* neither adopt an explicitly political stance nor simply 'reflect' contemporary events. But they undoubtedly bear the traces of their respective traumatic social contexts. In the late 1930s, for instance, some can be read as meditations on Popular Front hopes and then disillusionment, and in the post-war period, they explicitly engage with American culture, providing a cultural framework for shifting definitions of national identity. But the area in which they most visibly echo changing social parameters is in their delineation of gender relations.

Just like its American counterpart, French *film noir* is the genre *par excellence* of masculinity in crisis, brimming with vulnerable men drawn to crime, 'victims' of alluring females, or preys to a cruel fate. Building on the charisma of glamorous stars, the films side with these maladjusted figures. In the 1930s Jean Gabin epitomised the tragic proletarian hero haunted by the past, lured by a scheming – or even innocent – woman, defeated by evil patriarchs or just circumstances (*Pépé le Moko*, *Gueule d'amour*, *La Bête humaine*, *Le Quai des brumes*, *Le Jour se lève*). As we have seen, these overtly pessimistic scenarios drew critical disapproval in some quarters, yet their murderous and/or suicidal heroes did not trouble the censors (unlike in Hollywood, where various remakes saw their endings modified) and they continued to draw audiences. During and immediately after the war, the more weary masculinity of central male figures, in *Le Corbeau*, *Les Portes de la nuit*, *Quai des orfèvres*, *Une si jolie petite plage* and *Manon* (Clouzot, 1949) can easily be mapped against the traumatic defeat of France, the humiliations of the German occupation and the retributions that followed.

While some scholars see the godfather-like protagonists of the post-war gangster films as a symbolic restoration of patriarchal power, equally striking is these characters' ultimate powerlessness and penchant for nostalgia, despite the films' surface modernity. In *Touchez pas au grisbi* and *Rififi* (Jules Dassin, 1955) and many others, a stint in jail is a coded reference to the war years, and regret for the passing of the pre-war 'good old days' is pervasive. This is also striking in the self-conscious tributes to Hollywood *noir* towards the end of the period, as seen in Melville's anachronistic gangsters in *Le Doulos* and *Le Samouraï* (1967), respectively played by Jean-Paul Belmondo and Alain Delon.

Against this panorama of flawed, yet glamorous and charismatic male figures, the women of French *film noir* are less exalted, presented as marginalised and often degraded figures. Here too historical patterns emerge. Notable women in pre-war *noir* include the hapless prostitute of *La Chienne* (Janie Marèse), the kept women of *Pépé le Moko* and *Gueule d'amour* (Mireille Balin in both cases), the capricious child-woman of *La Bête humaine* (Simone Simon) – charming yet clichéd products of populist literature. One exception is the idealised romantic 'waif' of poetic realism, the archetype being Michèle Morgan in *Le Quai des brumes*. But across the decade, none of these women is endowed with much narrative agency or erotic power. In

Julien Duvivier's *La Tête d'un homme* (1933)

Yves Allégret's *Manèges* (1950)

the 1940s, *Le Corbeau* testifies to stronger female figures emerging in the war years, in *noir* as well as other genres. But with some exceptions, such as *Les Portes de la nuit*, in which the standard poetic realist woman is made to look like a Hollywood icon (initially to be played by Marlene Dietrich, replaced by the inexperienced Nathalie Nattier), post-war *noir* takes a striking misogynist turn. Extreme *noir* melodramas such as *Manon*, *Manèges* (Yves Allégret, 1950) and *Voici le temps des assassins* (*Deadlier than the Male*, Duvivier, 1956) showcase women as evil or perverse creatures bent on destroying men. Only in the rare instances when the *noir* women are embodied by major stars such as Simone Signoret in *Les Diaboliques* (Clouzot, 1955) and Brigitte Bardot in *La Vérité* (Clouzot, 1960) do they attain real glamour and a degree of complexity. Meanwhile, the *policiers* infantilise gangsters' molls, symbolised by the slaps they frequently receive; Melville's films relegate them further to the role of alibi, whether treated cruelly (*Le Doulos*) or kindly (*Le Deuxième Souffle*, 1966; *Le Samouraï*).

The sense of the popularity of French *noir* being used to mete out a symbolic backlash against the growing post-war emancipation of women in real life is hard to escape. Nor is this trend contradicted by auteur cinema adaptations of US *noir* fiction, such as Truffaut's *Shoot the Pianist*, *The Bride Wore Black* (*La Mariée était en noir*, 1968) and *The Mississippi Mermaid* (*La Sirène du Mississipi*, 1969). With very few exceptions, women in French *film noir* are denied both the transgressive power of the *femme fatale* and the affirmative role of the 'good girl' of their American counterparts. The real drama is always that of the young *homme fatal* or of the ageing patriarch.

Throughout the period evoked above, there were other successful genres in French cinema besides *film noir*, including comedy and costume film. Yet, as in Hollywood, it is *noir* that caught the cultural imagination. Like 19th-century readers of Hugo and Balzac and 20th-century fans of Simenon, we are endlessly drawn to the dark universe of crime, failure and melodrama, almost always ending in death. It is indicative that the best filmmakers in the period (Renoir, Duvivier, Clouzot, Melville among them) all worked in this idiom, producing a string of beautiful, sombre films. Like the literature of the *bas-fonds*, *film noir* projects a fantasy that may not be factually accurate but nevertheless gets to the heart of the darkest corners of society and human nature.

The 12 films discussed overleaf will screen at BFI Southbank, London, in the *Sight & Sound* Deep Focus programme: 'French Noir' from 17 October – 30 November. A complementary season of French *noir*s is screening at London's Ciné Lumière from 26 October – 4 December

Note perfect: François Truffaut's *Shoot the Pianist* (1960)

DISCINA/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK (1)

1 La Nuit du carrefour (Night at the Crossroads) *Jean Renoir, 1932*

The first film to feature Georges Simenon's policeman hero Jules Maigret, *La Nuit du carrefour* harnesses Renoir's casual early brilliance to Simenon's trademark atmosphere. The action of this low-budget film – most of it filmed on location and with far from perfect direct sound – takes place at a forlorn crossroads 30km north of Paris, mostly at night. Shots of dark, foggy or rain-soaked exteriors, barely pierced by feeble car lights, match the opacity of the plot.

The almost too elegant Pierre Renoir (the director's brother) introduces viewers to Maigret's famous 'sponge' detection method, silently soaking up the eerie atmosphere. In his sights are the beautiful Else (Danish actress Winna Winfried) and her 'brother' Carl (Georges Koudria). The pair's literal and metaphorical foreignness contrasts with the Frenchness of the neighbours at the local garage – some played by friends of the director, whose innovative shooting method beautifully serves the emerging *noir* cinema. As he remarked, "The actors, both amateur and professional, were so influenced by that sinister crossroads that they became part of the background. They enacted mystery in a way they could never have done in the comfort of a studio." While it disconcerted spectators at the time, *La Nuit du carrefour* has cemented its place as a cornerstone of French *film noir*.

2 Pépé le Moko *Julien Duvivier, 1937*

At first sight, *Pépé le Moko*, which takes place in sun-drenched Algiers, belongs to French colonial cinema and is an unlikely candidate for *film noir*. But this tale of gangster-on-the-run Pépé (Jean Gabin), whose downfall is set in train when he falls for beautiful Parisienne Gaby (Mireille Balin) while hiding out in the Casbah, bears the imprint of many *noir* narratives. Also *noir*-tinted is the hold the past has over Pépé and those surrounding him, all steeped in nostalgia and fatalism, including *chanteuse* Fréhel in her moving song.

More spectacularly, Duvivier's *mise-en-scène* sums up *noir* aesthetics in his use of chiaroscuro. Cinematographers Jules Kruger and Marc Fossard, influenced by their German expressionist peers, imaginatively exploit the Casbah decor to create striking lighting patterns – including over Gabin's face. The spotlights that throw ribbons of light on his hair and eyes signal him as poetically 'other' and elevate him from rough hoodlum to tragic hero. Described as "one of the most exciting and moving films I can remember seeing" by Graham Greene at the time, *Pépé le Moko* anticipates American *film noir*, as seen in the 1938 Hollywood remake *Algiers* by John Cromwell.

3 La Bête humaine *Jean Renoir, 1938*

Renoir's adaptation of Emile Zola's 1890 novel about train driver Jacques Lantier, who has inherited a mental illness from his alcoholic forebears that torments him with murderous impulses, owes its existence to Jean Gabin's interest in the project (and desire to play the engine driver). The opening sequence, showing him at the controls of the train speeding through Normandy and arriving at Le Havre, has become a cult among rail enthusiasts. *La Bête humaine* successfully welds a realistic portrayal of camaraderie among railway workers with dark, claustrophobic scenes of Lantier's fatal attraction to the beautiful Séverine (Simone Simon), leading to murder and suicide.

Train wreck: Jean Renoir's Emile Zola adaptation *La Bête humaine* (1938)

The signature noir motif of bands of darkness and light bathes 'La Bête humaine' in a menacing, though poetic, atmosphere

At the time, many criticised *La Bête humaine*'s pessimism, seeing it as evidence of Renoir's estrangement from the left at the end of the Popular Front. Today, it is Renoir and German émigré cinematographer Curt Courant's visual experimentation that catches our attention – the signature *noir* motif of contrasting bands of darkness and light, the way light reflects off metallic surfaces and mirrors, bathing the film in a menacing, though poetic, atmosphere. Despite its pessimism, this 'three-star film' – Zola, Renoir, Gabin – was a huge success, later remade in Hollywood as *Human Desire*, directed by Fritz Lang in 1954.

4 Le Jour se lève (Daybreak) *Marcel Carné, 1939*

Released in June 1939, *Le Jour se lève* marks a high point for director Marcel Carné, dialogue writer Jacques Prévert, set designer Alexandre Trauner and star Jean Gabin. With its dark, atmospheric visuals by cinematographer Curt Courant and pervasive sense of fatalism, balanced by the realistic rendering of mundane details, it also represents the culmination of poetic realism, the best-known shade of pre-war French *noir*.

Through striking use of flashbacks, the film tells the story of François (Gabin), a factory

Jean Renoir's *La Nuit du carrefour* (1932)

Julien Duvivier's *Pépé le Moko* (1937)

Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Le Corbeau* (1943)

Man in the mirror: Marcel Carné's *Le Jour se lève* (1939)

Mark of Cain: Pierre Chenal's *Le Dernier Tournant* (1939)

ALAMY (3)

worker romantically involved with young florist Françoise (Jacqueline Laurent) as well as with Clara (Arletty), assistant to louche entertainer and seducer Valentin (Jules Berry). François kills Valentin out of jealousy over Françoise and despite support from those around him, kills himself when the police close in.

Locked in his room for the duration of the film, Gabin brilliantly inhabits his tragic working-class hero, his minimalist acting style chiming perfectly against the superlative Arletty and flamboyant Berry. Despite its ironically hopeful title, *Le Jour se lève* summed up the anxieties of a country on the brink of war. It also seems to us today, as André Bazin put it, to embody "the ideal qualities of a cinematic paradise lost".

5 Le Dernier Tournant (The Last Turn)

Pierre Chenal, 1939

Shot three years before Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione*, and seven years before the Tay Garnett Hollywood version, this surprisingly little-known film was the first screen adaptation of James M. Cain's seminal *noir* novel, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (published in the US in 1934 and translated into French in 1936).

Transposing the Californian setting to the south of France, the film reprises the story of hapless Frank (Fernand Gravey), lured by sexy, sullen Cora (Michel Luchaire), to kill her older husband Nick, a road-side garage owner (Corinne Simon). The film contains the key *noir* narrative elements of doomed love and inability to escape the past, and classic *noir* visual style: Chenal and Christian Matras's virtuoso camerawork and low-key lighting were apparently admired by Orson Welles. While *Le Dernier Tournant* testifies to Chenal's taste for American crime literature, his version marks its Frenchness in two ways: a greater moral ambiguity and a different gender pattern. Where the 1946 American version emphasises the erotic charge of the femme fatale and Visconti's the attraction of the young male hero, Chenal gives most weight and sympathy to the husband, played by Michel Simon, significantly the greater star of the trio.

6 Le Corbeau (The Raven)

Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1943

With *Le Corbeau*, French *film noir* turned political. Produced by the Nazi-owned firm Continental during the German occupation of France, Clouzot's film tells the story of a typical small French town ('here or elsewhere') inundated with anonymous

poison-pen letters signed 'le corbeau'. Initially, the main target of the letters is Dr Germain (Pierre Fresnay), accused of performing abortions as well as of adulterous liaisons. Indeed, several women in the town are attracted to him, from prim Laura (Micheline Francey) to racy Denise (Ginette Leclerc).

Nicolas Hayer's black-and-white cinematography makes superb use of contrasts and shadows, underlining the film's atmosphere, pervaded by fear, suspicion and paranoia. The search for 'le corbeau' unveils every sin in the book, from jealousy and lust to aggression, betrayal, murder and lynching. The film's extraordinary darkness and the twin themes of the letters and abortion were fundamentally opposed to the values of the Vichy regime, as well as to those of the German occupier. This did not stop Clouzot from being punished at the Liberation for working for Continental. Since then, though, *Le Corbeau* has become the emblematic film of the French war years and a turning point in darkness on screen.

7 Quai des orfèvres

Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1947

Following his ban after the Liberation for making *Le Corbeau*, *Quai des orfèvres* (loosely based on a novel by Belgian crime writer Stanislas-André Steeman) marked Clouzot's triumphant return to filmmaking. This French version of a police procedural follows Inspector Antoine (Louis Jouvet) as he investigates the murder of a rich, corrupt businessman in which are implicated ambitious music-hall singer Jenny Lamour (Suzy Delair), her piano-player husband Maurice (Bernard Blier) and their glamorous neighbour Dora (Simone Renant), a photographer.

Clouzot's *policier* twist on post-war *noir* delivers a scathing portrayal of Jenny and Maurice's petit-bourgeois lives as well as corruption in the upper echelons of society. Both the shady world of the music hall and the harsh conditions of post-war Paris are wonderfully rendered in Armand Thirard's sumptuous cinematography. However, Clouzot's usual misanthropic vision is here tempered, allowing characters a degree of humanity: Jouvet's Antoine is kind-hearted, in spite of the cynical one-liners he delivers in his inimitable voice; Blier's timid husband is touching; and Delair's vivacious performance and talent as a singer transcend the misogynist innuendo of her part, even when she delivers her saucy 'Avec son tralala' number. Even more unusually, in Dora, Clouzot offers a sympathetic portrayal of a lesbian.

Heist society: Marie Sabouret and Jean Servais in Jules Dassin's *Rififi* (1955)

8 Une si jolie petite plage (Such a Pretty Little Beach)

Yves Allégret, 1949

The great matinée idol Gérard Philipe plays Pierre, an orphan who revisits a seedy hotel from his youth located on a rain-swept beach in northern France (the ironic 'pretty' beach of the title). To some extent he reprises the young Gabin's pre-war roles, although his sickly, desperate character illustrates the excessively morbid aspect of post-war French 'realist' *noir*. Pierre's despair is not relieved by romantic love or the friendship of co-workers. Around him the charming secondary characters have become ugly caricatures. Like Gabin's characters, the sad Pierre is haunted by the past, but he is powerless rather than tragic; his solitary suicide lacks the epic or social dimension of Gabin's in *La Bête humaine* and *Le Jour se lève*.

For director Yves Allégret and scriptwriter Jacques Sigurd, *Une si jolie petitie plage* echoed the difficult climate following the Liberation, marked by political disillusionment and social unrest. The film's dim treatment of female characters also testifies to the backlash against women after their wartime social progress. Nevertheless, the film's eerie universe, which resembles "an indelible image of hell on earth," according to critic David Thomson, is aesthetically redeemed by Henri Alekan's dark, sophisticated lighting, Philipe's glamour and the talent of the cast around him.

'Une si jolie petite plage' echoed the difficult climate following the Liberation, marked by unrest and political disillusionment

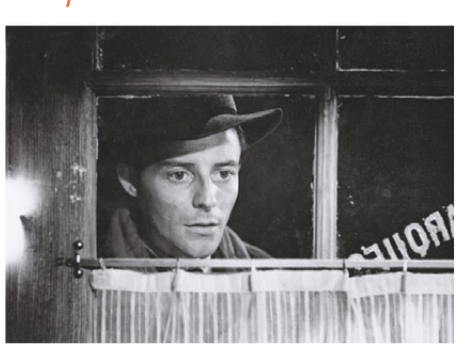
9 Touchez pas au grisbi

Jacques Becker, 1954

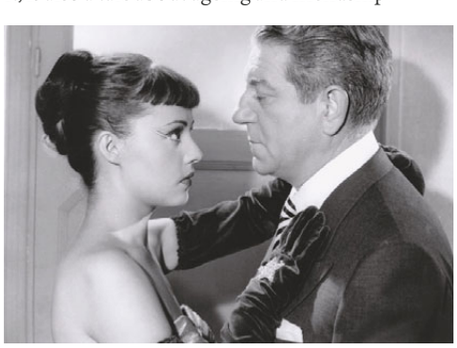
By toning down the violence and racism (and downright unpleasantness) of Albert Simonin's eponymous Série noire novel, Jacques Becker gave French *film noir* a hugely successful new twist, creating the French gangster film in the process. Many others followed, but *Grisbi* encapsulates the genre. Gabin is superlative as Max, a Pigalle underworld godfather to whom even his enemies defer. Max is aiming to use the proceeds of his last heist to retire in style, but finds his plan disrupted by rival Angelo (Lino Ventura in his film debut) and the ineptitude of his friend Riton (René Dary).

In his double-breasted suits, Max embodies both the old French patriarchal order, and the new Americanised modernity, with his well-appointed apartments, large cars and glamorous mistress. *Grisbi* playfully engages with generic motifs: hoodlums, nightclubs, gangsters' girls (one played by Jeanne Moreau in pre-New Wave mode) and the odd gunfight. But Becker, true heir to Jean Renoir, is just as interested in everyday rituals and Max's loyalty to Riton, expressed in the cult wine and pâté scene. Set off by Jean Wiener's memorable harmonica tune, this story of "deluxe fat cats", as François Truffaut put it, is also a tale about ageing and friendship.

Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Quai des orfèvres* (1947)



Yves Allégret's *Une si jolie petite plage* (1949)



Jacques Becker's *Touchez pas au grisbi* (1954)

10 Rififi
Jules Dassin, 1955

Described by the critic Philip French as "one of the greatest crime movies ever made", *Rififi* was American director Jules Dassin's return to work after five years of enforced inactivity as a result of being blacklisted in Hollywood during the anti-communist witchhunts. Based on Auguste Le Breton's Série noire novel, the film enabled Dassin to bring to a French topic and setting his considerable experience as the maker of seminal US *noirs* such as *Brute Force* (1947), *The Naked City* (1948) and *Thieves' Highway* (1949).

Dassin embedded his story in familiar Parisian locations and kept Le Breton's picaresque French characters – even featuring the slang typical of the Série noire in the iconic song, 'Le Rififi' (meaning 'a fight'), sung by Magali Noël's nightclub singer Viviane. Very French too is the world-weary hero Tony (Jean Servais), a characteristic *noir* figure haunted by the past. From the US Dassin brought a faster rhythm and streamlined action, as well as a more moralistic approach to crime. The two national influences seamlessly merge in the elegant *noir* photography by Philippe Agostini. Thanks also to its famous 20-minute heist sequence at the jeweller Mappin & Webb, executed in almost total silence, Dassin's perfect Franco-American hybrid met with huge popular and critical success.

11 Voici le temps des assassins (Deadlier than the Male)
Julien Duvivier, 1956

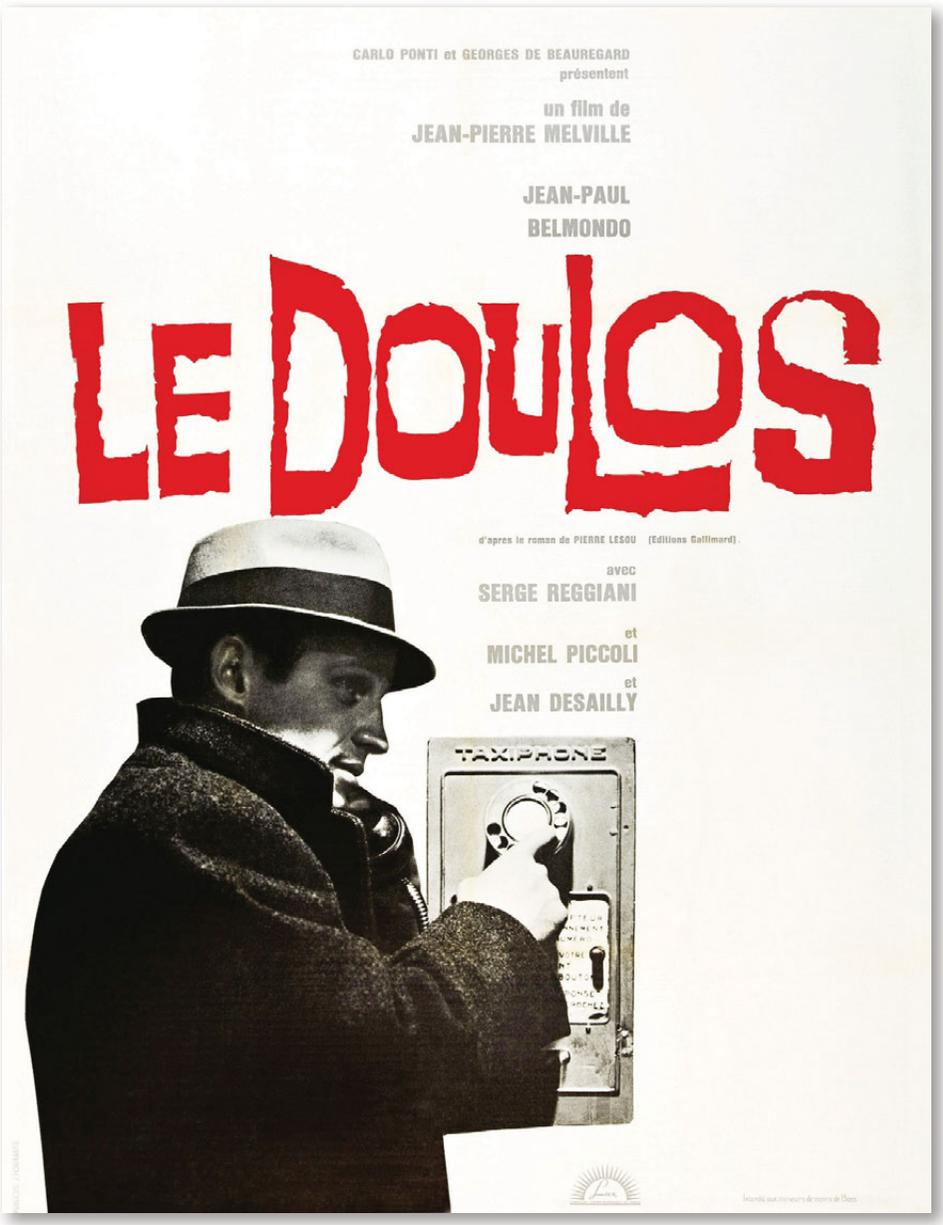
This collaboration between Julien Duvivier and Jean Gabin – their seventh since *Maria Chapdelaine* in 1934 – belongs to the darkest seam of French cinema, fusing Zola-style naturalism with crime and misogyny. Gabin plays Chatelin, a successful restaurateur in Les Halles, who falls for Catherine (Danièle Delorme), the scheming daughter of his former wife. The evil mother-daughter duo will stop at nothing to get his money, and in the process Catherine kills Chatelin's protégé Gérard (Gérard Blain). Her punishment comes with violence so horrendous it is left off screen.

Voici le temps des assassins contrasts Chatelin's integrity, generosity and professionalism with the moral depravity of Catherine and her mother (and in the case of the latter, also the physical degeneracy of drug addiction). Other men are naive or fools while women run the gamut from gold-diggers to cruel martinets, such as Chatelin's chilling mother. It takes Duvivier and Gabin's combined talent to turn this sordid tale into a consummate piece of classical French cinema. Against the baroque cruelty of the denouement, the film includes among its pleasures some wonderful character actors – such as Gabrielle Fontan as Madame Jules – and the evocative restaurant scenes against the backdrop of the now vanished food market of Les Halles.

12 Le Doulos
Jean-Pierre Melville, 1962

Melville considered *Le Doulos* (slang meaning both a 'hat' and a 'police informer') his first real *policier*. The film is based on the 1957 book by Pierre Lesou, a Série noire author noted for his first-hand knowledge of the French underworld, taste for stories of male friendship, and self-confessed 'feminophobia'. Melville accentuated the novel's sombre side through generic abstraction and virtuoso yet sober *mise-en-scène*. He also made good use of his charismatic stars Jean-Paul Belmondo and Serge Reggiani, helping the film to become a huge success despite its notoriously complex plot, built on an intricate web of deceptions.

Le Doulos's credit sequence stands as one of the most evocative openings of any *noir* thriller: a man in hat and trench coat – Reggiani's Maurice Faugel – walks through a grim underpass, silhouetted by Nicolas Hayer's black-and-white photography and accompanied by Paul Misraki's dramatic jazz score. The next sequence, in which Faugel kills a fence and buries the loot, distils urban alienation and the abstract melancholy universe in which the rest of the story unfolds. *Le Doulos* takes place in a recognisable Paris, yet simultaneously in a hybrid *noir* space that merges French idioms and American icons, not least in the classic gangster outfit that opens and closes the film.



Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Doulos* (1962) blends French and American iconography

***Voici le temps des assassins* (1956)**

EVERETT COLLECTION/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK (1), ITV/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK (1)

LFF ARCHIVE GALA

THE SHAPE OF NOIR TO COME

The 1929 film of Liam O'Flaherty's *The Informer* has all the ingredients of classic Hollywood *noir* – just a decade too early and an ocean away

By Bryony Dixon

"Film noir is a claustrophobic genre. There's no escape in film noir. There's a point in 'Miller's Crossing' where John Turturro's character is under the gun, and he says, 'Let me go, I'll leave, I'll go out of town,' and you wanna say, 'There is no out of town in film noir! There's only this closed system'..." – John Sayles

When writing about a little-known silent film it is always a temptation to connect it to something with a bit more currency in the public imagination – we should be beyond this really. But I make no apology for connecting *The Informer* with *film noir* because there is something interesting, if not eerily prescient, in looking at the film in that context.

The Informer, released in 1929, was a top-class production by British International Pictures, filmed in Britain and, typically for late 1920s European film, made with a very international team – a German director, Arthur Robison, who had made the expressionist classic *Warning Shadows* (1923), and German cameramen Werner Brandes and Theodor Sparkuhl (a key figure for the *noir* 'look', whose career spanned German expressionism, French poetic realism and classic American *noir*). The stars included the Swede Lars Hanson, recently back from Hollywood after starring in *The Wind* with Lilian Gish and *The Divine Woman* with Garbo, and the beautiful Hungarian actress Lya de Putti, most famous now for her part in *Varieté* (1925) with Emil Jannings.

The film was made during the transition to sound, in silent and part-talkie versions. Both the quality of the recording and the inappropriate accents undermine the power of the sound version but the silent film is a very superior production. It's a good late-20s drama, nicely produced and beautifully acted. But what are its *noir* credentials?

The story, based on a 1925 novel by the Irish writer Liam O'Flaherty, concerns a group of working-class Dubliners, members of a revolutionary party in the newly independent Ireland of 1922. One of their number, Francis, kills the chief of police in a shootout and goes on the run. The party gives him money to flee to America but he is tempted to return to Dublin to say goodbye to his mother and his former lover and fellow revolutionary Katie Fox, leading his erstwhile friend Gypo to inform on him with tragic results. Gypo has to come to terms

The plot has several noir components: doomed antihero, femme fatale, pursuit by nemesis, mean streets...

Pistol-packin' mama: Lya de Putti as Katie Fox, with Lars Hanson as Gypo Nolan, in *The Informer* (1929)

with guilt, and though he attempts to redeem himself, events conspire to drag him back into the Party's deadly grasp. The plot has several *noir* components: doomed antihero, femme fatale, pursuit by nemesis, mean streets, chiaroscuro lighting, use of close-up and mid-shots to create claustrophobic tension, overwhelming sense of fatalism and tragic redemptive acts. Though the story revolves round an underground political cell rather than organised crime, in terms of narrative structure this has the same effect – if you go against the organisation they will hunt you down. The only thing missing from the *noir* inventory is the hardboiled dialogue. So I think that, like Josef von Sternberg's *Underworld* (1927) and Uchida Tomu's *Policeman* (1933), *The Informer* stands up well as a proto-*noir*.

Of course, *film noir* is a concept imposed on a group of films from the 40s and 50s by later film historians – at the time, even the great exponents of American *film noir* didn't know that was what they were making. Like avant garde, *film noir* is an extremely nebulous term. Some wit once commented that a certain cultural production was 'not avant garde but avant garde-esque' – ie, made in the style of what was once genuinely avant garde or groundbreaking but in itself by definition not avant garde. The term *noir*-ish might be similarly deployed to define films made before the classic period of the 40s and 50s – gangster films such as Howard Hawks's *Scarface* (1932) or William Wellman's *The Public Enemy* (1931) spring to mind – and those made after, now often described as neo-*noir*.

Clearly, only the neo-*noirs* were made with a consciousness of the definitions of *film noir*, so perhaps authorial intent is not important – although Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton in their seminal book *A Panorama of American Film Noir* (1955) were keen to position directors as the prime creative force. In the case of *The Informer*, though, O'Flaherty's expressed intention for his novel, the film's source, seems to align particularly well with *noir*-ish values. In his 1934 autobiography *Shame the Devil* he wrote: "I worked out the plan of *The Informer*, determined it should be a sort of high-brow detective story and its style based on the technique of the cinema. It should have all the appearance of a realistic novel and yet the material should hardly have any connection with real life. I would treat my readers as a mob orator treats his audience and toy with their emotions, making them finally pity a character whom they began by considering a monster."

It is interesting that he should mention the detective story in conjunction with the technique of the cinema and that he should articulate the particular quality of reality and hyper-reality that is such a feature of the *film noir*, as well as describing the dilemma of identifying with the anti-hero in a narrative. Perhaps this is why filmmakers were so quick to adapt his novel for the screen, and why it was adapted again by John Ford in 1935 – although he had to steamroller it past RKO's front office: perhaps it seemed too personal a project, since Ford was O'Flaherty's cousin, but it won three Oscars and made good money for the studio. In 1968 O'Flaherty's story was adapted again as *Uptight* – relocated to the black community of Cleveland, Ohio – by *noir* director *par excellence* Jules Dassin.

Shadow of a gunman: Francis encounters his own picture on a 'wanted' poster

The silent version best captures the novel's essence, though inevitably it makes changes – Katie is not a prostitute, although she is not above using her sexuality against the ruthless party boss Gallagher, and her romance with Gypo is enhanced for narrative effect; but the atmosphere of a world without possible escape, the 'closed system', is well realised. In the film this is signalled in the scene, not in the novel, in which Francis, just arrived back in Dublin, is staring at his own picture on a 'wanted' poster when the silhouette of a patrolling policeman falls across the wall. In a masterly scene later on, we see fate creep up again, using Gypo's better nature against him to drag him back to his doom: he is at the train station ("Let me go, I'll go, I'll leave town"), almost clear, when he is called upon to help another with the very same money he received for informing on his friend. Almost got out. But there is no out of town in *film noir*.

A new restoration of *The Informer* will be premiered at the BFI London Film Festival on 14 October and released on DVD in early 2017

No way out: police corner cop killer Francis

MAKING WAVES

Director Paul Witzig liked Tamam Shud's soundtrack for his 1969 surf documentary *Evolution* so much, he dispensed with narration entirely

By Sam Davies

For a film of condensed action, Paul Witzig's *Evolution* (1969) has a pleasantly ambient quality: its choreography is without plot, or any real forward momentum. It has road movie elements – it follows a group of surfers as they move up and down the south-east Australian coast and travel to Italy, France, Spain, Portugal and Morocco. It even has competitive elements, as the surfers feature in the 1968 World Championships in Puerto Rico. But these are mere details – accidents of captioning almost – that occasionally punctuate a film that has no real past and no real future, just the fleeting present, as surfer after surfer attempts to answer the question of what to do with the wave they're given. Witzig's cherry-picking of highlights has a flattening effect, in which surfing is all peaks, with none of the inescapable troughs of despond in between the waves and none of the longueurs of swimming to position, and waiting, and falling and starting again. The brief moments of startling physical grace that are the surfer's currency are almost devalued by the sheer wealth of them on display, as they describe elegant curves on the staves of the incoming tide.

In the way it can be dipped into, and out of, *Evolution* is as blank as a Warhol screen test or Empire State Building fixed shot. Key to this quality is Witzig's decision to ditch the stilted information-film narration of his earlier surf documentary *The Hot Generation* (1967) and just use the music of New South Wales groups Tamam Shud and Tully. The story goes that Tamam Shud improvised their contributions while watching an early cut projected on to a studio wall, recording them all in two and a half hours and mixing them in another 90-minute session. The finished album, recently reissued by the Brooklyn-based imprint Anthology, was later rounded out with another eight tracks, though any differences are undetectable.

You can just about hear, if you want to, echoes of the surfers' improvisational adjustments in the crosstalk and grace notes of Lindsay Bjerre and Alex Zytnik's guitars. But the music is never a straightforward analogue of the onscreen action: it never has the same beatific concentration or ease of movement. Tamam Shud had started off specifically as a surf-rock outfit, cutting instrumentals like 'The Rip' under the name The Four Strangers in 1964. A few changes of name and line-up later they had become Witzig's unofficial in-house composers, recording the single 'The Hot Generation' for that film and going into the studio to record music for *Evolution* as a special commission. While their *Evolution*-era sound is often compared with West Coast acid reference points like the Grateful Dead or Moby Grape, it's less fluid, its touch less light. It has more in common with Long Island heavy rockers such as Vanilla Fudge; at times it sounds like Cream and the following wave of British blues power trios, such as The Groundhogs. None of these are bands you could imagine rolling up their jeans for a paddle, let alone surfing. There's a malevolent undertow to the music, as if even in south-eastern Australia the group had picked up on the canker at the heart of the counter-culture that would unravel elsewhere at Altamont and at Roman Polanski's home in Benedict Canyon. 'Tamám shud' itself is a Farsi phrase meaning 'it is finished': it appears on the last page of Edward Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. But in Australian popular memory it has another connotation: in 1948 a man's neatly dressed body was found lying, as if asleep, on a beach near Adelaide. The words 'tamám shud' were printed on a scrap of paper – apparently torn from the *Rubaiyat* – that was found on the body; the man's identity and cause of death have never been established.

Surf's up: Tamam Shud's soundtrack was apparently improvised while watching an early cut of the film

Witzig was so enamoured of the soundtrack that he decided *Evolution* could do without narration entirely. *Evolution* anticipates narration-free documentaries like Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982); but it also has something in common with the surge of private or amateur filmmaking that has come with the proliferation of cheap editing software. YouTube offers numberless homemade football compilations, stitching together goals, assists and tackles into highlight reels that are both magical and banal. They flatter but – like Witzig's film – also flatten so that a Championship plodder's two minutes of decent football suddenly compare to two minutes of a decorated international's, all soundtracked by hard European trance or Autotune-heavy hip-hop. *Evolution* is also a forerunner of the DIY film culture that brought surfers, skaters and punk rockers together in the coastal sprawl of Los Angeles and Orange County, to document and soundtrack each other – the milieu where Spike Jonze developed: his first proper filmmaking commission was a music video for Sonic Youth after they'd been introduced to his gonzo skate films by contacts in Los Angeles.

There's a malevolent undertow to the music, as if the group had picked up on the canker at the heart of the counter-culture

Above all, *Evolution* has an inadvertent poignancy, capturing on 16mm a short moment of youth and energy, expressing an imperative to document these brief miracles of balance and movement. *Evolution* captures tricks performed for an audience that didn't exist, when surfing was still a niche interest rather than a billion-dollar business, and puts names to the performers in question (Nat Young, Wayne Lynch, Edward Livingston Spencer, 'The Animal' and more), before the waves inevitably close over them.

Tamam Shud's *Evolution* soundtrack is out now from Anthology Recordings

BE KIND REWIND

Tape gaffer: Henry Rollins shows off his collection in Zack Taylor's *Cassette: A Documentary Mixtape*

In our digital, algorithm-driven world, the imperfections of the humble cassette tape have made it a symbol of integrity

By Sukhdev Sandhu

In a prefatory essay to the book accompanying her show *Film* at Tate Modern's Turbine Hall in 2011, the artist Tacita Dean wrote: "A world that remembers our lives' algorithms in order to outsmart us with ourselves is a world without pause for thought. Serendipity, coincidence, chance, forgetting, loneliness, solitude, boredom are all part of our human condition and inspiration, and should be left unresolved and unfigured out by software." In the same volume, Alexander Horwath, director of the Austrian Film Museum, claimed that "Just as the 'free flow of capital' has successfully shaken off its ties to the real world economy, the 'free flow of content' no longer wants to be chained to the matter from which it was born."

Versions of those arguments may come to mind while watching American director Zack Taylor's new documentary *Cassette: A Documentary Mixtape*. It's at once a history of the humble tape, an exploration of its cultural uses and phenomenological qualities, and an act of reputation-salvaging for a format repeatedly scorned for its poor sound, cursed for its tendency to tangle, and attacked as a menace to the music business (In the early 1980s adverts by the British Phonographic Industry used the slogan 'Home Taping Is Killing Music'.)

Like *Helvetica* (2007), Gary Hustwit's influential exploration of the modernist typeface, *Cassette* reveals the personalities responsible for a facet of contemporary design that, to most of its users, has no backstory at all. Taylor travels to Holland, where he meets 88-year-old Lou Ottens and members of the team at Philips who, in 1963, revealed their invention at the Funkausstellung (radio exhibition) in Berlin. Old diagrams and prototypes are brought out from the archives and, like architects' unbuilt plans, are fascinating as maps of futures that never materialised. Ottens himself, wry and understated, is an enemy of nostalgia and professes to be puzzled by the revival of cassettes.

Most of the film's interviewees disagree. Henry Rollins, shown pacing around his cave-sized tape collection, cherishes tapes not so much because he's a collector as because he doesn't believe in the digital economy's theology of dematerialisation or trust the outsourcing of data to the cloud. The cheapness of tapes allowed outsider artists such as Daniel Johnston and the hip-hop DJ Bobbito Garcia to record and distribute music that would otherwise have struggled to find – or create – audiences.

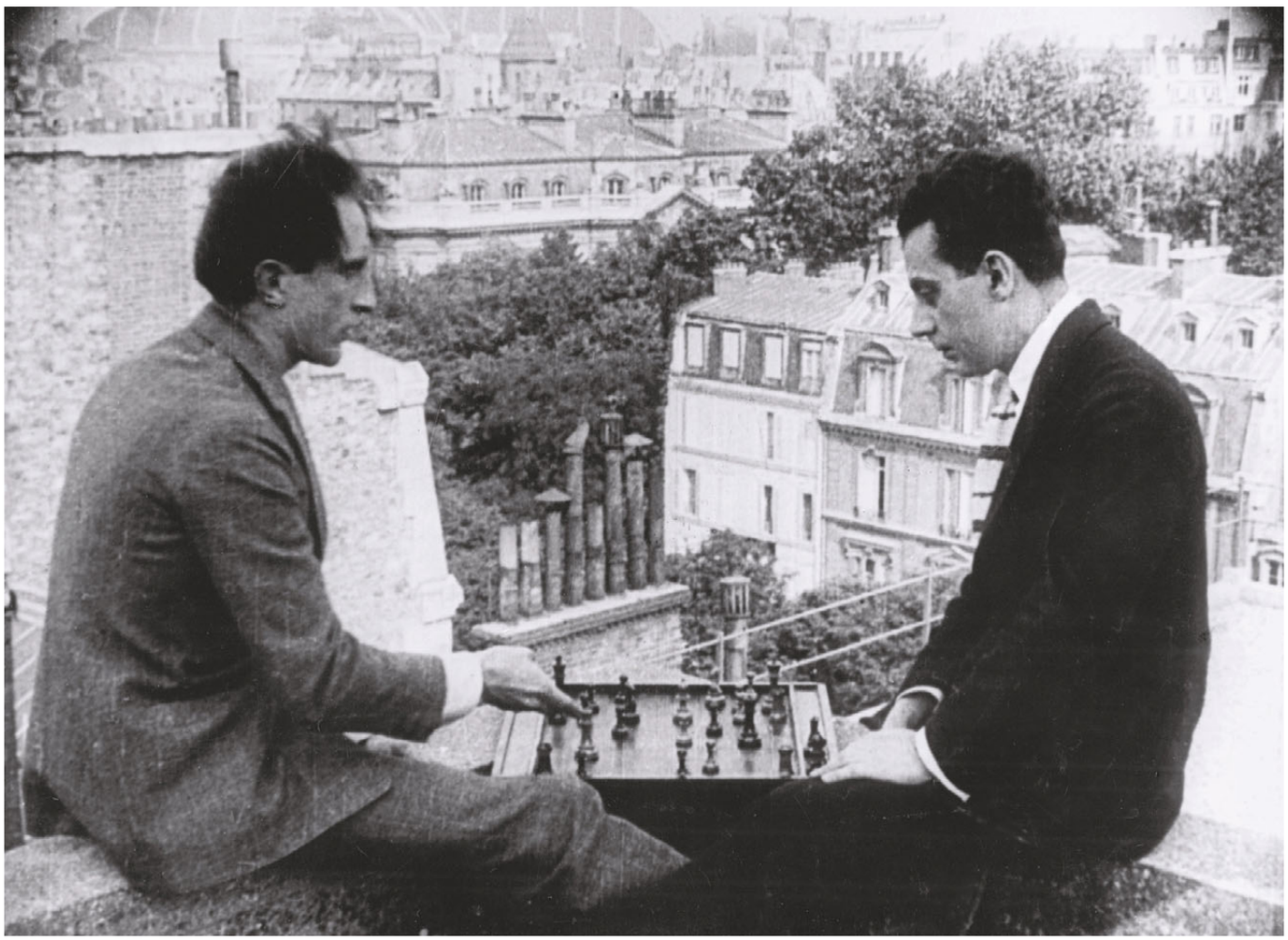
Cassette is most interesting when it shifts from celebrating tapes as *audio povera* or expressions of DIY ideology to hear more speculative voices. Rob Sheffield, author of *Love Is a Mix Tape* (2007) – a well-received memoir about the premature death of his wife, whom he had courted with hand-made cassettes – talks about the way that tapes wear out through repeated use: they absorb time, rather than aspire towards impermeability and perpetuity as CDs and MP3s do. To Thurston Moore, formerly of Sonic Youth and publisher of the Ecstatic Peace Library, cassettes have a precious corporeality: "Our bodies are not digital. We're not robots. Your body gets worn down the more it goes over the tape head of life." He points out the irony that Taylor is shooting this film on digital.

Henry Rollins cherishes tapes because he doesn't believe in the digital economy's theology of dematerialisation

Taylor's documentary appears at a moment when cassette sales are rising and Cassette Store Days are commonplace. Tapes are seen as cute additions to merchandise stalls and, even though major labels are getting in on the act, still have an alluringly homespun, countercultural vibe. (No one's going to get rich on the back of 100- or 200-copy editions.) In the independent sector, bespoke reissue label Finders Keepers puts out cassette editions of Andrzej Korzynski's score for Andrzej Zulawski's *Possession*; the Tapeworm label has released late 1970s interviews with Derek Jarman; Purge.xxx issues collectable tapes from maverick auteurs such as Chris Petit and Frans Zwartjes.

Another director might have made more of the appeal of the cassette to fans of industrial music (Throbbing Gristle famously released a 26-tape collection in a suitcase), as a site of experiment for interdisciplinary art and music magazines (*Tellus*, *SFX*), or of its circulation in the global south (Hindi film soundtracks, the Awesome Tapes From Africa label). But it would be impossible for Taylor to be exhaustive. And his film does inspire notions of a season devoted to cassettes – such as John Smith's wonderful archaeology of London's sonic unconscious, using found fragments of discarded tape, *Lost Sound* (1998-2001); Mark Craig's *Talk to Me* (2006), 20 years of autobiography told through answerphone tapes; and Rollo Jackson's *Tape Crackers* (2009), a monologic celebration of rave-era pirate radio. All films – to go back to Tacita Dean – that speak eloquently about "serendipity, coincidence, chance, forgetting, loneliness, solitude".

OBJECTS TALK IN THEIR SLEEP



The Dada they come: Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray, up on the roof in René Clair's film *Entr'acte* (1924)

In the Paris of the 1920s, Dada, a movement that rejected art and sense, found its perfect medium in film

By Nicole Brenez

tickling in the throat from small letters on fire
several drops of defeated light in the mirror suffice
and the best cinema is the mirror of the diaphragm
telegram delivering each degree of dry cold
telegraph me the density of love
to fill the rebec's song with Chinese ink

So wrote Tristan Tzara in issue 4-5 of *Dada* magazine, house magazine of the Dada movement, which first emerged 100 years ago. Early 20th-century Europe was a hothouse of self-consciously avant-garde artistic movements; but even among all that ferment, Dada stood out. Holed up in neutral Switzerland while World War I raged outside, Tzara and his collaborators, including Hans Arp and Hugo Ball, repudiated logic, convention and indeed art: the name was either the French word for 'hobby-horse' or an invitingly meaningless pair of syllables. Dadaists embraced the nonsensical and the ready-made, favouring cut-ups and collage as means of creating poetry and art, often incorporating fragments of the real world – train tickets and the like – into their work. Unsurprisingly, they also liked film, an artform whose essence was cutting up and juxtaposing reproduced fragments of reality.

Tzara's poem was part of a series entitled 'Cinéma calendrier du coeur abstrait' – 'Cinema calendar of the abstract heart'. In a visionary manner, he combined the camera, collage, the visual arts, modernity and erotic sentimentality. Meanwhile, Marcel Duchamp's notes on the cinema were practical and exploratory, announcing numerous aesthetic initiatives to come – including one that would, 40 years later, be a trademark of Lettriste cinema, multi-projection: "Use two projections, one behind, one in front of the screen, lots of headlights (real ones) turned on the audience." By contrast, Tzara's poem had no programmatic purpose. And yet which artist would show himself capable of achieving the alliance between Dada and film?

21 July 1921. The American painter and photographer Emmanuel Radnitzky, otherwise known as Man Ray – an anarchist trained in materialist criticism and unlimited expressivity and Tzara's New York correspondent – arrived in Paris. His friend Duchamp introduced him to the Parisian branch of the Dada movement: André Breton, Louis Aragon, Paul Éluard, Philippe Soupault... As it had in Zurich, Berlin and New York, in Paris Dada affirmed its aesthetic revolution through a series of memorably explosive soirées, incorporating visual art and living spectacle: readings of manifestos, theatre, dance and cinema. These began on 23 January 1920 with the *Premier vendredi de Littérature* – the First Friday of Literature – in the Palais des Fêtes on the rue Saint-Martin, and culminated on 6 July 1923 with a soirée entitled *Coeur à barbe* (*The Bearded Heart*) at the Théâtre Michel on the rue des Mathurins. At this historic event – which marked the schism between the dadaists and the surrealists – Tzara presented his play *Le coeur à gaz* (*The Gas Heart* or *The Gas-Operated Heart*) alongside music by Erik Satie, Georges Auric and Igor Stravinsky, poems by Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes and Iliazde, and films by Charles Sheeler and Hans Richter.

Tzara also asked Man Ray for a film. In his autobiography, Man Ray said that the film was made the night before, using whatever materials were to hand: he sprinkled salt and pepper on one

Unsurprisingly, the dadaists liked film, an artform whose essence was cutting up and juxtaposing reproduced fragments of reality

piece of unexposed film, pins and thumbtacks on another, illuminated the film for a few seconds, then developed it, spontaneously inventing the title *Le Retour à la raison* (*Return to Reason*) on the night. During the screening the film broke several times, to its creator's immense relief, saved by the splice as others would be by the gong: the Théâtre Michel was transformed into a boxing ring when Éluard assaulted the performers of *Coeur à gaz*, the Dadaists ejected Breton and Benjamin Péret, and everyone insulted Jean Cocteau.

So it was that Man Ray created not just a film, but also the legend of *Return to Reason* as an improvised work, nonsensical and demented to the point of unleashing chaos among the great poets of the age. He established a new horizon for 20th-century artistic expression, filled with inventions that introduced randomness, destruction, excess and violence in all their forms back into the general vocabulary of creativity. "You tell me that people will boo it? So much the better! I'd rather hear them howling than clapping," Francis Picabia declared of another emblem of Dadaist cinema, *Entr'acte* (made in conjunction with René Clair in 1924). This was enough to make *Return to Reason* a black-and-white stone in the luxurious garden of historical forms, and to justify the poet Robert Desnos's description of Man Ray as "*le peintre des syncopes*" – the painter of swoons.

But the myth doesn't stand up to scrutiny: the title of the film must have been fixed for a while, since it was included on the poster for the event and the screening was due to be accompanied by an original piece of music by the expatriate American composer George Antheil. Beyond this, *Return to Reason* shows signs of having been worked on extensively and systematically. Its apparently incoherent syntax in fact displays a range of emerging cinematic forms, from the subliminal image buried within its unfolding, to the pure continuity of the celluloid strip that lies beneath the jerky movements of photogramme. *Return to Reason* also uses film in three ways – first, classically, as a medium through which the world can be conveyed, with its imprinted shots of the funfair, of Man Ray's mistress Kiki, and of his own works of visual art, *Dancer/Danger*, a 1921 collage, and *Poème optique*. Next, the film uses its material in a constructivist fashion, like an exposed engine, showing photographic negatives, test shots and draft work, including glimpses of technical notes: "Man Ray, to shoot 5 times." Finally, it uses film as a ground, the material on which art is made, as canvas is used by a painter, through its inclusion of images of cine-rayograms, which involve a continuous direct impression of objects on celluloid.

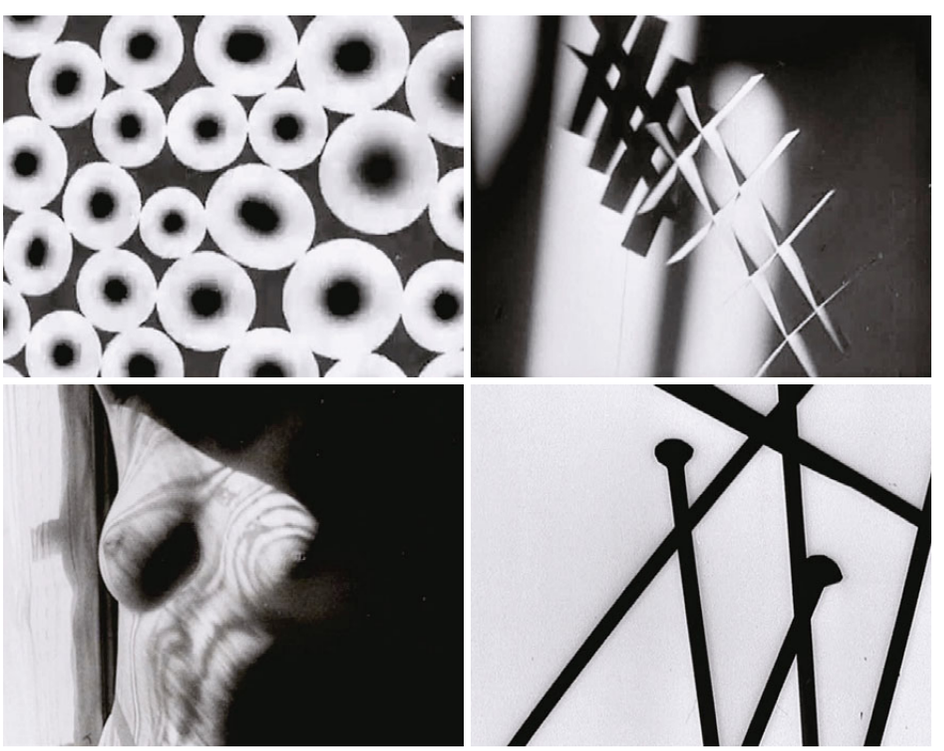
In 1926, Man Ray described the rayogram in these terms: "Taken during times of emotional contact, these images are the oxidations of residues, fixed by light and chemistry, living organisms." In *Return to Reason* he was applying to cinema a tried and tested technique, no longer revolutionary – and he would continue to use it, along with solarisation (a technique that involves exposing a partially developed photograph to light, creating halo-like effects), right up to the end of his life. Why such attachment to this technique? Because, involving as it does physical

Poster for *The Bearded Heart* soirée on 6 July 1923

contact between the object and the medium of reproduction, the rayogram affirms the power of touch in representation, transforms a motif of haphazardness into a fetish and liberates an imagination filled with notions of contiguity, proximity, of the caress, an imagination that reinvests the image with a radiant presence. The photogramme becomes relic, icon, aura, an instance of living presence and thus of desire. The optical libido aims at a symbolic appropriation that Man Ray himself defines in terms of rape. It's indeed this tactile imagination, deepening the erotic properties of the imprint, which continues to enchant and inspire contemporary experimental cinema, especially the work of the Austrian artist Peter Tscherkassky who, in 2001, made *Dream Work*, in homage to Man Ray.

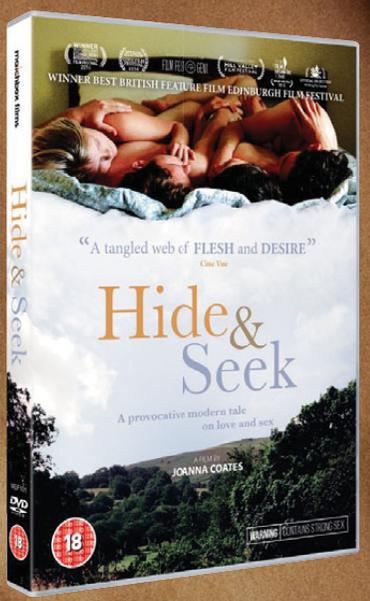
Dream Work concludes a 'CinemaScope Trilogy' begun in 1997. In this final instalment Tscherkassky goes back to Man Ray's cine-rayogram. It's no longer a matter, though, of placing simple objects on the unexposed film, but on another, already exposed piece of film. A complex transfer of motifs takes place, from one to another – up to seven layers per photogramme. Cinema takes itself on, takes its own fingerprints in service of a tormented inquest into its own identity. What, fundamentally, is there in these images? Where is the repository for the organic presence, caught by the light? What is the exact nature of this substance, at once chemical, mechanical and metal? And who or what is it that continues to flutter in darkness, when the light wasn't able to capture any outline? Tscherkassky's investigation begins with a genre film, Sidney J. Furie's *The Entity* (1981) – a sequence in which a woman is raped. But by way of conclusion *Dream Work* brings a different kind of visual material to bear: the thumbtacks, pins and salt crystals of *Return to Reason* suddenly return, via this circumlocutory journey across images, to their aesthetic origin – that is to say, to the purity of contact, the intensity of desire, the frankness of libido.

Without even any need for a physical overprint, suddenly the face of the actress Barbara Hershey reveals itself as that of Kiki, as if all any image has ever done was unconsciously duplicate the original mould. But far from guaranteeing the reality of appearances, this duplication serves to demonstrate the haunted, opaque and unconscious nature of phenomena. "Objects talk in their sleep," Tristan Tzara wrote of Man Ray: it's when working to record their nocturnal confidences that cinema is able to see itself.



Images from Man Ray's *Return to Reason* (1923)

WINNER BEST BRITISH FEATURE FILM EDINBURGH FILM FESTIVAL



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SPACE PILOT

The experimental spirit of the London Film-makers' Co-op is alive and well, and living in Stephen Connolly's explorations of place

By Vlastimir Sudar

Throughout the 60s and 70s, London was a thriving hub of experimental cinema – what is mostly remembered now is the wealth of work produced at the London Film-Makers' Co-op by artists such as Lis Rhodes, William Raban, Malcolm Le Grice, et al. One offshoot of this activity was the experimental filmmaking course that Le Grice set up at Saint Martin's School of Art in 1964, which soon recruited other filmmakers from the LFMC as teachers. Before this course was subsumed into a general fine art strand in the late 90s it yielded many famous alumni, including Jarvis Cocker, the hip-hop *enfant terrible* M.I.A., and the director Joe Wright (*Atonement*, 2007). But if you were on the look-out for contemporary manifestations of the LFMC's ethos among the course's former students, then Stephen Connolly's *oeuvre* might well be the place to start.

After a stint as a social worker with the homeless in London between 1987 and 1992, Connolly enrolled on Le Grice's course and was taught by, among others, John Smith – the filmmaker best known for *The Girl Chewing Gum* (1976) – the feminist multimedia artist Tina Keane and the animator Vera Neubauer (Le Grice himself had by now moved on). One of Connolly's first films after completing his masters was *The Reading Room* (2002), which situates itself firmly in LFMC territory, addressing similar preoccupations: a static time-lapse camera observes the Reading Room of the British Museum, producing images that blur any human presence into traces, non-representational smears. These are offset by the library's pin-sharp architectural forms, a contrast that emphasises the durability of the space as opposed to our human impermanence. The film is silent, Brechtian distance and humour introduced by a superimposed text which explains that Connolly was not allowed to record sound on location, and that archive sound from the BBC would have been exorbitantly expensive; the text also points out that Karl Marx wrote *Das Kapital* in this very place.

Like many of the structuralist/materialist films made under the aegis of the LFMC, *The Reading Room* flares out at the end, reminding us that it is only as long as the reel of film loaded in the camera. As the last celluloid unspools, abstract shapes in flaming yellows and reds 'unseat' the image – a nod to the structuralist/materialist maxim that form and content are inseparable and that representation should be reflexively revealed, principally through an emphasis on film's material qualities. Connolly soon took off in his own direction, though, adhering only to the LFMC's modernist ideals of continual innovation and confrontation with the political and social contradictions of the times.

In Connolly's work, unlike that of his LFMC predecessors, there is no rivalry between film, video and digital: they are simply different media to be employed to suit his needs, just as a painter might use oil or water-colour. Connolly's choice is often a collage; and as well as static shots, he has been known to employ an elaborately moving camera, often from a travelling vehicle, fracturing reality into what is seen through the glass and what is reflected in it. The films often investigate public spaces by way of the French theorist Henri Lefebvre's idea that space reflects the social relations that produce it and is used to maintain hegemonies.

Death Valley days: *Zabriskie Point (Redacted)* (2013)

Like Antonioni, Connolly wanted to produce a work as 'an idea in landscape', setting story aside to reflect on the broader context

Such philosophical notions are particularly important in later works such as *Zabriskie Point (Redacted)*, which premiered at the Rotterdam festival in 2013. This film explores the areas of Death Valley where Michelangelo Antonioni's 1970 film was shot, but using a digital camera rather than 16mm; this enabled longer takes and allowed Connolly to blend in more easily, observing the spaces inconspicuously alongside other tourists. Connolly's film intercuts black-and-white archive footage of the social unrest that inspired Antonioni's film with shots of its locations, which have now become tourist spots partly because of the original film. Connolly has said that, like Antonioni, he wanted to produce a work as "an idea in landscape", setting story aside in order to reflect on the broader context.

Machine Space

That strategy of combining found, carefully choreographed and documentary footage guides Connolly's latest film *Machine Space* (2016), which focuses on the link between real-estate value and race. Connolly again takes the audience on a car journey, this time through Detroit, observing the spaces framed by the windscreen, interleaved with testimony from residents and images of a family playing a board game. This reflection on Detroit's ills, the post-industrial behemoth as a 'fluid, spatial-capital machine', while it could easily work in a gallery, is very much a single-screen piece, designed for the darkness of the cinema. Connolly is a filmmaker first, but also an artist and craftsman; he describes his contribution in the credits as "image/edit/sound" – in line with the hands-on ethos of the LFMC. But the broader range of both formats and subject-matter – from a ballet school in Cuba to Folkestone archives and tragic working-class heroes – means that his inquisitive, self-reflexive films take experimental cinema in new directions, revitalising the LFMC's ethos for the 21st century.

***Machine Space* will be shown as part of the Experimenta strand at the BFI London Film Festival on Monday 10 October at BFI Southbank**

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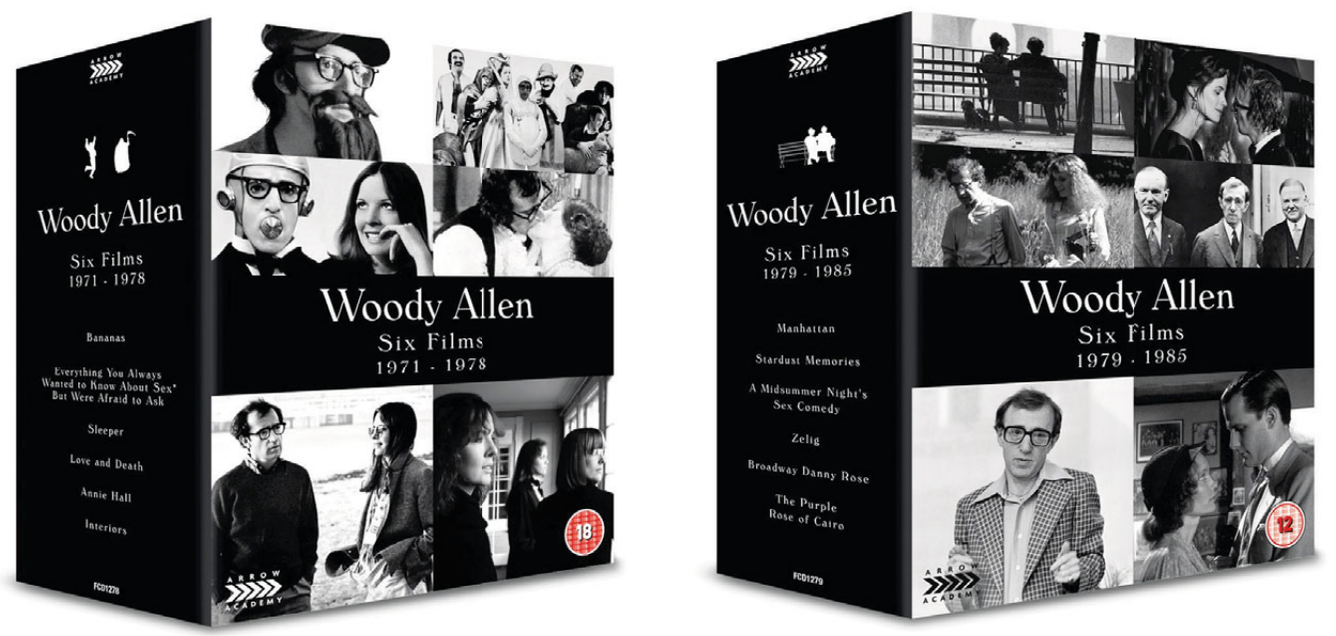

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For there to be an almost total absence of white faces in the cast of a worldwide Disney release remains highly unusual, and possibly unprecedented

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Split decisions: Cédric Kahn and Bérénice Bejo as Boris and Marie

After Love

France/Belgium 2016
Director: Joachim Lafosse

Reviewed by Sue Harris

Spoiler alert: this review reveals key plot details

The original French title of this family drama, *L'Economie du couple* – something closer to 'Marital Finances' than 'After Love' – has the prosaic air of a fact-finding documentary. Fêted at Cannes in this year's Directors' Fortnight, Belgian director Joachim Lafosse's film harks back to the intimacy and sparseness of Maurice Pialat, offering a forensic dissection of the family unit. A fly-on-the-wall aesthetic lets us witness a series of scenes from a very modern marriage: that of a couple who have apparently fallen out of love and are cohabiting uneasily in the family home while settling their monetary affairs.

Boris (Cédric Kahn) and Marie (Bérénice Bejo) are parents, flawed in the same way as any busy working couple with a home to run and young daughters to look after. Some of the time they seem to muddle along maturely in their airy Brussels home, but at other times they argue about timetabled access to the girls and separate shelves in the fridge. This, we soon realise, is a couple capable of deploying a piece of cheese as a weapon: shouting angrily about who paid for it, who didn't, and who is going to have some anyway. Living neither together nor apart, Boris and Marie attempt a grown-up arrangement, prioritising family life over their own desires, and normalising the reality of the future separation for their twins Jade and Margaux. But the reality is that they simply can't agree on who is entitled to what share of a property now worth €400,000, and neither has the wherewithal to buy the other out.

As befits a narrative in which the main issue is the money bound up in the bricks and mortar of the family home, the space of the house itself is the film's stage until the closing five minutes. A camera watches Marie arrive home with her daughters and tracks her slowly as the evening business of cooking dinner, checking homework and running their bath gets under way. The naturalism of the scene speaks to the home as sanctuary, with the gate closed for the day on public face and social convention. But suddenly, the mood shifts as Marie fixes her gaze on an offscreen presence. Her anger seeps through

Bejo and Kahn with Jade and Margaux Soentjens

a series of sharp statements: "What are you doing here?", "It's not eight o'clock yet," "It's not Wednesday." The girls shriek with delight that their playful daddy is home for bathtime, and make a beeline for the games on his computer; mum says they can't play them because it's not Friday. She warns him that she hasn't made enough food for him to have dinner with them, but he sits at the table anyway, making sure the girls clear their plates and eat the good-for-them stewed fruit for dessert; mum tidies the half-full plates away and gives in to their pleas for ice cream. In the opening moments, then, the dynamic of this couple is revealed as harried parental one-upmanship in which each takes turns to assert their authority and undermine the other, while the girls just get their own way.

Lafosse sets Marie up as the unsmiling, no-fun parent whose function is to grimly impose order both on her children and their wayward father, and Boris is cast as the hard-done-to husband who can't do right for doing wrong. Marie, who has the run of the house, breaks her silence only to

The dynamic of this couple is revealed as harried parental one-upmanship in which each takes turns to undermine the other

give him instructions, while Boris retreats to the tiny study for work and sleep – his "dog house", as he terms it when an estate agent comes to make a valuation. But slowly, a backstory and an explanation of sorts come into focus: Marie paid the deposit on the house with money from her parents and her savings; Boris, who had nothing at the time of purchase, renovated it, and thereby increased its value. Boris now has debts – sufficient to bring a team of heavies to the family door – and he is unreliable in his contribution to the household funds, regularly missing mortgage payments. He has promised to buy Margaux new football boots, but never manages to get around to it; when Marie buys them herself the day before the match, he is furious, and somehow manages to lose them on their first outing, saying he'll buy another pair when he gets paid.

A pattern emerges of a fiscally responsible and profoundly fed-up woman keeping a roof over everyone's heads, and a financially incontinent man whose unpredictability no longer holds any charm. Our sympathy for Boris wanes further as we see how he manipulates situations to his advantage, regularly blindsiding Marie in front of the children: announcing that the girls have been invited to spend a month on holiday with his mother in the summer; or that maybe he and Marie won't split up after all. When she calls him on his behaviour she can barely speak – her refrain is a clenched-teeth "What are you playing at?" Again and again her privacy is disrupted by Boris, who refuses to respect her boundaries and rules. The home is a less and less peaceful place when he is there, and every irritation is amplified for Marie: the clinking of crockery in the kitchen, the turning of the pages of a book, the bleeps of Boris texting a friend, footsteps padding about outside the bathroom. It's a war of domestic attrition. We believe Marie when she tells her friends during dinner in the garden that over time love has quite simply turned to hate.

For all this, it seems to me that the film does not want to argue that the reverse of love is hate. Indeed, the deep connections between these two wounded people are sensitively outlined and explored in a pair of very gentle yet complex scenes. The first is a nocturnal meeting between them that is almost balletic in its choreography: in one single take we see Marie rise from her bed, grab a drink from the fridge and go and sit silently in Boris's study; Boris in turn gets up and goes to the fridge, returning with a beer; they remain together for a moment, then Marie rises and returns to bed, crying quietly. Their unspoken intimacy resonates in the plaintive Bach score, the intersecting major and minor chords of the Prelude in C Minor echoing the painful negotiations of their entangled lives. It's a standalone moment, in which music expresses where words can't the emotional weight and depth of their bond. The second such scene also involves music, as first Boris, then Marie join in a dance with their daughters as if this were the most natural thing in the world. As Marie begins to weep, Boris holds her close, and she doesn't resist, clinging to him as the girls imitate them, joining in the game. They are temporarily reconciled in a gesture of mutual trust, and their desire is volcanic: they make love behind closed doors, unseen, and without subsequent commentary.

The film's denouement is the tragic catalyst for the film to venture beyond the home and out into the world where their family life can be retrieved, supported and reset. The film – and Marie and Boris – finally begins to breathe, as an unseen judge sets out the agreement for a separation of the estate. Our last sight of the couple is of them seated in the distance at a café table, talking quietly and companionably about their future. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jacques-Henri Bronckart
Olivier Bronckart
Sylvie Pialat
Benoît Quainon
Screenplay/ Adaptation/ Dialogue
Mazarine Pingeot
Fanny Burdino
Joachim Lafosse
With the collaboration of
Thomas Van Zuylen
Director of Photography
Jean-François Hensgens
Editor
Yann Dedet
Art Director
Olivier Radot
Sound
Marc Engels
Ingrid Simon
Valérie Le Docte
Thomas Gauder
Costume Designer
Pascaline Chavanne

©Les Films du Worso, Versus Production, RTBF, Prime Time

Production Companies
Les Films du Worso and Versus Production presents a Les Films du Worso, Versus Production, RTBF (Télévision Belge), VOO, Be tv, Prime Time co-production with the assistance of Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles with the participation of Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée with the support of Tax Shelter du Gouvernement Fédéral Belge, Inver Invest, Eurimages, Wallonie, Fonds Audiovisuel de Flandre (VAF) with the participation of Canal+, Ciné+, TV5 Monde, ARTE/ Cofinova 12 in association with Le Pacte, Indéfilms 4
A film by Joachim Lafosse
Developed with the support of Indéfilms Initiative 3, B Media Développement, Palatine Etoile 11 Développement, Angoa-Agicoa
Executive Producer
Gwennaëlle Libert
Film Extracts
Krach (2010)
La Religieuse/ The Nun (2013)

Cast

Bérénice Bejo
Marie Barrot
Cédric Kahn
Boris Marcker
Marthe Keller
Christine, 'Babou'
Margaux Soentjens
Margaux
Jade Soentjens
Jade

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Curzon Artificial Eye

French theatrical title
L'Économie du couple

Brussels, the present. Marie and Boris are a divorcing couple who are continuing to live together while their financial affairs are sorted out. Marie, an academic from a wealthy family, has invested the most financially in the home over the 15 years they have lived together, while Boris, a handyman, has improved its value by substantial renovation work. They are unable to agree on how much Boris should receive when the house is sold: Marie thinks one third of the value is reasonable, but Boris claims an equal share. He has substantial debts and is unable to afford other accommodation, and insists he will not leave until she agrees a half-share settlement of €200,000. Marie's mother Babou offers Boris paid work and somewhere to live in return for renovating the old family home, but Marie will not allow this. Marie tries to impose a routine on family life, but their twin daughters Jade and Margaux are regularly caught in the crossfire of the parents' arguments, as are Babou and the couple's circle of friends. Boris is beaten up by his creditors; he moves out after Marie lends him €10,000 to pay them off. When he looks after the girls while Marie goes away for the weekend, Jade takes an overdose of her mother's sleeping pills and is hospitalised. Marie and Boris finally realise the effect their actions are having on the children, and agree to divorce amicably. They split the value of the house equally, and commit to shared custody arrangements for the girls.

Kate Plays Christine

USA/Greece 2016
Director: Robert Greene
Certificate 15 112m 4s

Reviewed by Erika Balsom

Google 'Christine Chubbuck' and the first suggestion will be to add 'video' to your search terms. What video? In 1974, Chubbuck, a news anchor in Sarasota, Florida, committed suicide on live television at the age of 29. Before pulling the trigger, she announced, "In keeping with Channel 40's policy of bringing you the latest in blood and guts, and in living colour, you're going to see another first: attempted suicide." The internet is awash with images of death, but Chubbuck's is nowhere to be found. The media ecology of 1974 was radically different to that of today: live television was often unarchived, VCRs had yet to populate homes, and duplicates were laborious to produce. The sole copy of the videotape of Chubbuck's suicide – made in the studio at her request – has never been shown publicly and has by now in all likelihood fallen into a state of decay. It is a fate unthinkable for the digitally captured and circulated deaths of the 21st century, for Tamir Rice, Oscar Grant and so many others.

The missing image of Chubbuck's death – the shock of the image itself and the shock of its absence – is at the heart of Robert Greene's *Kate Plays Christine*, a documentary following the indie actress Kate Lyn Sheil as she prepares to star in a film about Chubbuck's life and death. Kate travels to Florida to research her role, visiting key locations and interviewing people who might provide insight into why Christine killed herself. She shops for a gun at the Bullet Hole, the establishment where Christine purchased her revolver; she talks to a mental-health specialist about the psychology of suicide, to a local historian about his memories of the event.

In the absence of the crucial, obscene document, fiction takes hold. Donning a cheap wig and spray-on tan, Kate plays Christine in a series of stilted re-enactments, some of which involve real locations and individuals encountered in her research. If it seems as though these awkward, ugly sequences will result in a terrible movie, worry not: very much after the fashion of *The Act of Killing* (2012), this film-within-the-film has no existence beyond *Kate Plays Christine*. (A more conventional treatment of Chubbuck's story, entitled *Christine*, premiered at Sundance alongside Greene's film, but has no relation to it aside from the shared subject matter.) A fictional biopic provides a fictional premise for a documentary of sorts, a film that is above all a portrait not of a dead news anchor but of a living actress. Kate plays Christine only in order to play Kate, a woman who is ambivalent about her profession and worried that her impulse to act is "perhaps an unhealthy one". The film drives home her identification with her character: like Christine, Kate is single and in a line of work that is, for women at least, cruelly bound to beauty and self-display. A man at a boat party casually tells Kate, "You're 31? No one's gonna want you any more" – though whether he's referring to her prospects for romance or casting remains unclear.

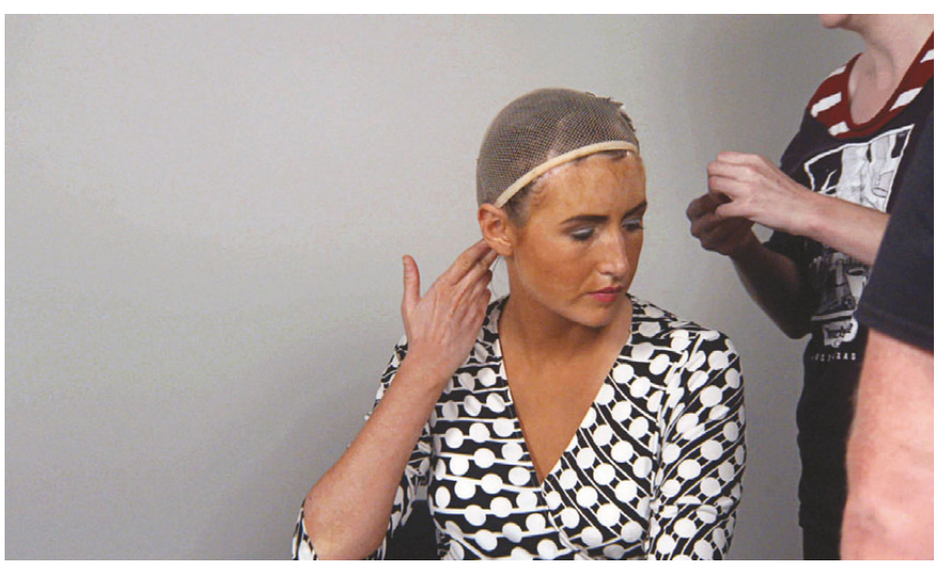
Performance anxiety: Kate Lyn Sheil in *Kate Plays Christine*

In this focus on the emotional life of a female performer, *Kate Plays Christine* follows closely on the heels of Greene's 2014 documentary *Actress*, which accompanies Brandy Burre, formerly of *The Wire*, as she attempts to return to acting after a hiatus devoted to childcare. Burre's relationship is in turmoil and all signs point to her career being irremediably stalled; Greene's documentary gives her the starring role that otherwise eludes her, and she eagerly performs her real life for his camera. And yet the spotlight comes at a cost: both films are marked by a male director's fascination with the vulnerability and sadness of struggling actresses, by the perverse pleasure of seeing them suffer the pain of failure and the anxiety of ageing in an industry fixated on youth. In *Kate Plays Christine*, this gaze hits both its titular figures and at moments becomes a topic of explicit interrogation.

Kate plays Christine only in order to play Kate, a woman ambivalent about her profession and worried that her impulse to act is unhealthy

How sorry should we feel for Kate? How concerned should we be with Greene's attitude towards her? Perhaps not very, because perhaps she is not a documentary subject at all, no more real than Fritz Lang playing 'Fritz Lang' in *Le Mépris* (1963). One might expect that the palpable artifice of the re-enactment sequences would serve to throw into relief the unscripted veracity of the rest of the film, but this is far from the case. On the contrary, beginning with the fictional premise of a fictional film, dramatisation bleeds with increasing strength through to the end. Greene underlines, sometimes heavy-handedly, that Kate is performing even when she isn't acting. Cinematography and *mise en scène* tend to foreground premeditation and choreography, and at one point Kate explains how she would act differently if the camera weren't there. Exaggerating the propositions of *Actress*'s stylised *vérité*, *Kate Plays Christine* uses the figure of the actress to insist on the ubiquity of performance and to assail the desire for authenticity.

Certainly, we are all performers. The moment the camera starts to roll, reality is transformed. Isn't this old news by now? It would be difficult to find a film student who isn't well versed in the dangers of assuming objectivity and immediacy. Yet *Kate Plays Christine* hammers this lesson home, frequently allowing it to take precedence over sincere interest in its subjects. How quickly yesterday's vanguard critiques become today's textbook moves. Occasionally, such as in its interviews with local performers, the film drifts into mild *Borat* (2006) territory, staging situations in which one party is in on



Sheil donning permatan and wig to play Christine Chubbuck

Moving target: Sheil visiting a gun range in character as Chubbuck

the joke and their interlocutor seemingly not. Or maybe *Catfish* (2010) would be the more apt comparison: everyone is in on it except for the viewer left to wonder if absolutely everything has been fabricated, or just a little. No doubt Greene would prefer invocations of Oppenheimer or Herzog, but it is difficult to discern any kernel of 'ecstatic truth' here. Rather, *Kate Plays Christine* resonates most as a sophomoric assault on documentary's long-beleaguered claims to actuality, parroting what has become by now a cynical, spurious cliché: reality or fiction, it makes no difference, everything is a construction.

After a summer in which Donald Trump and Nigel Farage ushered in an age of post-truth politics on both sides of the Atlantic, is it still necessary or compelling for filmmakers who depend on the frisson of the real to insist that we cannot believe in what we see? This is by no means to advocate for a return to nonfiction purity. Everything is indeed performance, but performance is not a monolithic category: it can be put to radically different ends. Many recent employments of docufiction – and there have surely been many – turn to fictionalising techniques in order to contest hegemonic narratives, revive lost histories or open on to the affective realms of subjectivity, fantasy and imagination. In other words, the best of them delight in contamination in order to lead back to truth, not to eradicate its possibility.

As *Kate Plays Christine* draws to a close, Kate's uncertainties mount as to whether she will be able to go through with the re-enactment of the on-air suicide. Her climactic actions, captured largely in a smudgy image streaked by scanlines so as to simulate the textures of video, seal the film's liquidation of reality. The image of actual death is a limit case for documentary and its ethics of spectatorship. It proffers the really, undeniably real. It can so easily be the subject of prurient interest, yet it also possesses a superlative testimonial value. As such, is it not the very epitome of the power and problems of documentary itself? Too clever by half, *Kate Plays Christine* approaches these questions but takes only a superficial interest in them. To do them justice would require understanding documentary as something more than a confidence trick.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Douglas Tirola
Susan Bedusa
Written by
Robert Greene
Cinematography
Sean Price Williams
Edited by
Robert Greene
Production Design
John Dickson
Original Music
Keegan DeWitt
Sound
Rachel Cameron

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Production Companies
Faliro House presents a 4th Row Films production in association with Prewar Cinema Productions
A film by Robert Greene
Made with the generous support of Sundance Institute Art of Nonfiction Initiative
Made possible in part by the Rooftop Films Filmmakers' Fund
Supported by the Tribeca Film Institute
Executive Producer
Christos V. Konstantakopoulos
Film Extracts
Listen Up Philip (2014)
Sun Don't Shine (2012)

With
Kate Lyn Sheil

In Colour
[1.78:1] and [1.33:1]

Distributor
Dogwoof

On 15 July 1974, in Sarasota, Florida, 29-year-old news anchor Christine Chubbuck committed suicide on live television by shooting herself in the head. A single video recording of the event apparently exists but has never been seen publicly. Now, more than 40 years later, indie actress Kate Lyn Sheil travels to Sarasota to research Chubbuck's life and death as she prepares to play her in an invented film, one with no existence beyond 'Kate Plays Christine'. Sheil conducts interviews, visits sites of interest and reads about suicide in an effort to comprehend Chubbuck's actions. In the process, she reflects on the craft of acting and her identification with the dead woman; like Chubbuck, Sheil is single, doubtful of her "desire to be seen and recognised" and ambivalent about her involvement in a profession predicated on self-display. Re-enactments of key scenes from Chubbuck's life are interspersed with these preparatory actions, often blurring the line between the staged and unstaged. As the time comes to dramatise Chubbuck's final gesture, Sheil is uncertain as to whether she will be able to fulfil the demands of her role. She goes through with the re-enactment of the suicide, but not before delivering a monologue to camera, asking viewers to confront their own desire to see death on screen.

Read it and weep: Amy Adams as Susan, passive in a part that submerges her natural energy

Nocturnal Animals

USA 2016
Director: Tom Ford

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

The best moment in *Nocturnal Animals* occurs when New York gallery owner Susan (Amy Adams) accidentally cracks an underling's smartphone screen and is told not to worry about it: an upgraded version is coming out next week. It's a good gag on modern cycles of commodification and disposability, and it gives Tom Ford's second outing as a film director after 2009's stiff, mannered – and also acclaimed and Oscar-nominated – *A Single Man* a little frisson of contemporary resonance. It's also a hint that Ford may have a sense of humour, a little of which can go a long way in making a monogrammed genre piece like *Nocturnal Animals* more enjoyable than the sum of its mostly self-serious parts.

As debuts by famous international fashionistas turned Venice-attending film directors go, *A Single Man* was, if not hugely promising, then at least willing to court contentiousness by making alterations to a beloved source text. Its half-reverent, half-revisionist treatment of Christopher Isherwood's 1964 novel showed an artist trying to actively think his way through his material instead of simply capitulating to it. Austin Wright's 1993 novel *Tony & Susan* is not similarly seminal stuff, but in choosing it here, Ford has actually given himself a chance to make two sophomore features in one. Following the book, *Nocturnal Animals* has a dual narrative structure in which two stories are crosscut for the bulk of the running time, with roughly equal screen time allotted to each.

One of these scenarios is 'realer' than the other. *Nocturnal Animals* opens on Susan, whose marriage to a philandering asshole (Armie Hammer) is stuck in a luxurious rut, and whose art-world-darling status brings scarcely more pleasure – and just maybe makes her a surrogate for her writer-director, who uses these early scenes to play up all manner of culture-vulture decadence. For instance, when we see that Susan's new exhibition is composed entirely of projected images of super-corpulent Middle American women go-go dancing nude – *Red-White-and-Blue-Velvet* – it seems as though we're being invited to laugh at both the spectacle itself and the pretensions that would create it in the first place, whether they belong to Susan or Tom Ford or, perhaps, to the sort of audience that would see a movie like *Nocturnal Animals* in the first place. So far, so self-reflexive – and successfully so.

The severity of the project gets (unfortunately) clarified with the introduction of the second story, which is framed as the contents of a not-yet-published novel mailed to Susan by her ex-husband Tony, who includes a note suggesting they get back in touch. As Susan reads through the manuscript over the course of a lonely weekend, we see its story visualised as a lost-highway thriller in which a family driving through West Texas is menaced, run off the road and worse by a trio of redneck thugs. That the pater is played by Jake Gyllenhaal – whom we also see in flashbacks as Tony – suggests that the scenario has been designed to have some personal resonance for its advance reader, whose visible disturbance at each new turn of the screw is also probably meant to be a mirror of our own clammy reactions.

So: once more through the looking-glass between reality and fantasy, that jagged cinematic terrain contested over the decades by Keaton, Cocteau, Deren, Lynch and Apichatpong – none of whom should lose any sleep over Ford's incursion on the territory. He's offering a knock-off, not an upgrade. *Nocturnal Animals* is far too sober to access subconscious fears or desires, at one point resorting to a Brian De Palma-ish jump scare (we're talking *Raising Cain* quality here) to keep the idea of blurred binaries alive. Ford doesn't have the knack for true uncanniness, and *Nocturnal Animals* stays safely within its carefully diagrammed metafictional conceit, never risking

Ford lacks the knack for true uncanniness, and 'Nocturnal Animals' stays safely within its carefully diagrammed metafictional conceit

the sort of incoherence that often makes for truly unsettling cinema. As flashbacks fill in the gaps of Tony and Susan's relationship, Ford's need to make sure we totally understand the connections between the dissolution of their relationship and the book-within-the-film's tale of abduction, loss and revenge transforms the movie into a strangely academic exercise, and the ratio of skilfully acted anguish to actual elicited emotion is middling.

These flashbacks are easily the weakest aspect of *Nocturnal Animals*, and they let the actors down badly. Besides the fact that it's hard to buy Adams and Gyllenhaal as undergrads-in-love (despite the latter's ever-boyish features), the phoniness of their meet-cute courtship makes it harder rather than easier to invest in the feelings of their present-tense incarnations. (Adams's glassy passivity in a part that submerges her natural energy doesn't help matters.) Having not read the novel, I can't say if Ford botches or simply faithfully reproduces its apparent thesis, which is that the indecisiveness and weakness in everyday life demonstrated by artistic types doesn't necessarily connote a dearth of character and conviction. It's a theme that's at once irresistible to other artistic types and also pretty much just common sense that doesn't need to be elucidated at length, and certainly not via such carefully worked, quasi-horror-movie metaphor-mongering. That Ford needs to employ an overacting Laura Linney, as Susan's society-viper mother, to act as a devil's advocate just goes to show how little he trusts his viewers to intuit anything for themselves, and the presumptuousness becomes seriously gruelling.

For all its problems with tone (monotonous) and theme (obvious), *Nocturnal Animals* is 'well made', in that Ford has assembled a very talented group of technical collaborators. Joan Sobel, who cut her teeth in the 1990s working with Paul Thomas Anderson and Quentin Tarantino, contributes some superbly timed and hard-edged editing. Cinematographer Seamus McGarvey, surely thrilled to not be constrained by post-production special-effects considerations as in *The Avengers* (2012), perfumes the images just so, and does a credible Roger Deakins impression in the pitch-black/headlamp-glare desert-nighttime sequences. And the film has an ace up its silk sleeve in the form of Michael Shannon, who appears in the thriller story as a small-town cop investigating the roadside attack.

Though clearly one of the great American actors of his generation, Shannon is often hard to take in his featured roles – such as his Oscar-nominated turn as a holy fool in 2008's *Revolutionary Road* – because (a bit like Christian Bale) he so gamely commits to parts that give him too much rope. Here, cast as the same sort of dusty archetype that Tommy Lee Jones knocked out of the park in *No Country for Old Men* (2007), he's been given just enough to play with, so that his grim-reaper stare and expertly calibrated physicality produce pure pleasure. Lumbering through crime scenes and interrogation chambers like a laconic giant, towering over Gyllenhaal – the Stetson adds at least two inches – Shannon crafts an appealingly ambivalent figure: as the detective becomes more invested in the violent, tragic case that's careered into his jurisdiction, his humanity simultaneously deepens and recedes. The actor's line readings are just curt and funny enough that the predictably grim proposition his character poses to the distraught husband and father in his care acquires a wry, semi-satirical dimension. And because he gets more to do as the movie goes along, he gives an impression that things are still entertaining, which then vanishes at around the same time he does. In a film that closes on a note of supposedly devastating absence, it's really only Shannon who's missed in the end.

Jake Gyllenhaal plays Susan's ex Tony, and Edward, the father in the novel-within-the-film

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Tom Ford
Robert Salerno
Based on the novel *Tony & Susan* by Austin Wright
Written by
Tom Ford
Director of Photography
Seamus McGarvey
Film Editor
Joan Sobel
Production Designer
Shane Valentino
Music
Abel Korzeniowski
Production Sound Mixers
Scott Harber
Lori Dovi
Costume Designer
Arianne Phillips

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Production Companies
A Focus Features presentation of a Fade To Black production
A Tom Ford film
In association with Artina Films

Cast

Amy Adams
Susan Morrow
Jake Gyllenhaal
Tony Hastings/ Edward Sheffield
Michael Shannon
Bobby Andes
Aaron Taylor-Johnson
Ray Marcus
Isla Fisher
Laura Hastings
Karl Glusman
Lou
Armie Hammer
Hutton Morrow
Laura Linney
Anne Sutton
Andrea Riseborough
Alessia
Michael Sheen
Carlos

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures International
UK & Eire

New York, the present. Gallery owner and artist Susan is unhappy with her recent opening, and suspects her husband is cheating on her. She receives an advance copy of her ex-husband Tony's new novel, entitled 'Nocturnal Animals', and spends a weekend reading it. In the novel, Edward, a husband and father driving through Texas, watches as his wife and daughter are abducted by three local men, who rough him up and leave him out in the desert at night; the next day he comes across the raped and murdered bodies of his wife and daughter. Susan is horrified by the book but keeps reading; she remembers dating Tony when they were younger, and deciding to end their relationship when she felt he wasn't going to make anything of himself as a writer. In the book, Edward gets a chance to identify one of the assailants and interrogate another, but there's not enough evidence to convict. A local detective offers him an opportunity to mete out some unofficial justice, and brings two of the kidnappers to a secluded house. One is shot while trying to escape; Edward catches up with the other man later and shoots him dead after a struggle. Susan remembers Edward discovering that she'd had an abortion after breaking up with him, clarifying the book's story of a father who loses his wife and daughter at the same moment; she understands that 'Nocturnal Animals' is a metaphor for their relationship. She arranges to meet Tony for dinner, but he doesn't show up.

Akira

Director: A.R. Murugadoss
Certificate 15 136m 35s

Reviewed by Naman Ramachandran

It is foolish to expect logic in a mainstream Bollywood movie, but *Akira* (no relation to the 1988 manga animation but a remake of the 2011 Tamil film *Mouna Guru*) stretches the limits of credulity to breaking point.

Akira is an innocent Mumbai university student caught up in the machinations of corrupt cop Rane and his efforts to secure a carload of stolen cash without any witnesses. Her imminent murder is thwarted by a ludicrous concatenation of circumstances, including a dead phone battery, a stalled vehicle, an out-of-range radio and a misfiring gun; and she has a classmate whose response to a father demanding academic excellence is to turn into a kleptomaniac.

The only pleasures in this sorry enterprise stem from watching a female protagonist outwitting and beating up predatory men, and from the gleefully demented performance of part-time actor and full-time filmmaker Anurag Kashyap (*Gangs of Wasseypur*) as the main villain of the piece.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
A.R. Murugadoss
Screenplay
Karen Singh Rathore
Story
Santha Kumar
Based on *Mouna Guru* [2011] written by Santha Kumar
Director of Photography
R.D. Rajasekhar
Editor
Sreekar Prasad
Art Direction
Aparna Sud
Songs
Music:
Vishal Dadlani
Shekhar Ravjiani
Lyrics:
Kumaar
Manoj Muntashir
Background Music
John Stewart Eduri
Sound Designer
Dileep Subramanian
Costumes
Sakshi Mehra
Megha Tandon

Production Company
A Fox STAR Studios and A.R. Murugadoss production

Cast
Sonakshi Sinha
Akira Sharma
Konkona Sen Sharma
S.P. Rabiya
Anurag Kashyap
A.C.P. Rane
Amit Sadh
Sidharth
Raai Laxmi
Maya
Atul Kulkarni
Akira's father
Smita Jaykar
Akira's mother
Chaitanya Chaudhary
Ajay Sharma
Ankita Karan Patel
Shilpa, sister-in-law
Nandu Madhav
Rajeshwar
Teena Singh
Nikki
Urmila Mahanta
Anna
Mishiekka Arora
younger Akira

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

India, the present. A young woman named Akira moves to Mumbai for her studies. Corrupt cop Rane and his men witness a car crash, find millions of rupees in the boot and, after killing the driver, conspire to keep the cash. A prostitute that Rane visits films him talking about the loot. Akira's kleptomaniac hostel mate steals the camera from the prostitute; Rane and his men kill her. Rane's men believe that Akira is involved and abduct her. She escapes. Rane has Akira committed to a mental institution but she escapes. Honest cop Rabia uncovers the truth. However, when she is about to arrest Rane and his men, her superior officer informs her that the driver of the accident vehicle was a member of a sect: if the news spreads that he was killed by a police officer, riots will break out, killing thousands. Akira takes the blame and is released later.

American Honey

USA/United Kingdom 2016
Director: Andrea Arnold
Certificate 15 163m 34s

A taste of money: Sasha Lane

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

Andrea Arnold made her name with distinctively photographed films about social outsiders, often young women, from the provocative revenge drama *Red Road* (2006) to a sensuous adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* (2011). *American Honey*, her first film to be made outside the UK, has most in common with her portrait of a frustrated teenager on an Essex estate, *Fish Tank* (2009), though the divide between rich and poor gapes in all her films. With this class-conscious road movie, Arnold takes a risk by setting out to pass comment on social inequality in a foreign country.

American Honey follows the trail of Texas teenager Star (Sasha Lane), who leaves her thankless life caring for her younger half-siblings to join a magazine sales crew on the road. These self-styled 'sales associates' are led by a glassy-eyed boss called Krystal (Riley Keough) and her pet salesman Jake (Shia LaBeouf), who starts an affair with Star. Their sales techniques are ethically reprehensible and only sporadically effective – preying on customers' weaknesses until they pay out of pity, lust or guilt.

In opposition to countercultural road movies such as *Easy Rider* (1969), Krystal's team travel in pursuit of the American Dream, not to escape it. The US lays out its inequalities for the crew through the van window – the spreading lawns of well-heeled suburbia, the slipshod children playing in motel car parks – and Krystal schemes to exploit them. In a neighbourhood rich on oil money she hands out "dirty white trash" costumes like a latterday Peachum, and tells the boys to target the lonely wives. "These are poor people like you, so just have normal conversations," she commands. When Star clocks up her first sale, she

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Lars Knudsen
Jay Van Hoy
Pouya Shahbazian
Alice Weinberg
Thomas Benski
Lucas Ochoa
Written by
Andrea Arnold
Photography
Robbie Ryan
Editor
Joe Bini
Production Designer
Kelly McGehee
Sound
Rashad Omar
Costume Designer
Alex Bovaird

©Parts & Labor LLC/ Pulse Films Limited/ The British Film Institute/Channel Four Television Corporation
Production Companies
Maven Pictures, Film4, BFI present a Parts & Labor/Pulse Films production in association with ManDown Pictures
Developed with the support of Film4
Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund
Executive Producers
Rose Garnett
David Kosse
Ben Roberts
Lizzie Francke
Celine Rattray
Trudie Styler
Charlotte Ubben
Hardy Justice
Marisa Clifford
Paul Grindey
Mike Goodridge
Melissa Hook
Shahbazian

Cast
Sasha Lane
Star
Riley Keough
Krystal
Shia LaBeouf
Jake
Raymond Coalson
JJ
Chad McKenzie Cox
Billy
Verronikah Ezell
QT
Arrielle Holmes
Pagan
Garry Howell
Austin
Crystal B. Ice
Katness
McCaul Lombardi
Corey
Shawna Rae Moseley
Shaunte
Dakota Powers
Runt
Isaiah Stone
Kalium
Kenneth Kory Tucker
Sean
Christopher David Wright
Riley
Will Paton
backseat cowboy

In Colour
[1.33:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures International UK & Eire

NB: crew members are listed onscreen alphabetically by first name, with no job designations.

Star, a mixed-race teenager from Texas, is the carer for her younger white half-siblings. She meets Jake, who offers her a job, so she leaves the children with their mother and meets him the following day. The job is selling magazine subscriptions door-to-door. Star meets the team and their boss, Krystal. Jake trains Star to sell but she disagrees with his methods, which involve lying to customers. The next day, Jake and Star argue and she hitches a ride with a group of older men. Jake follows her; after he threatens the men with a gun, the pair steal the men's car, then have sex. Jake tells Star they must keep their relationship a secret from Krystal. One day, Krystal drives the female members of the team to an oilfield. Star arranges to have sex with one of the workers for $1,000. Jake assaults the man and then fights with Star. Later, Krystal tells Star she is thinking of sacking her, and that she has sent Jake away. But the next day Jake is back; as the team dance around a campfire that evening, he draws Star aside to give her a gift.

yells in triumph, "I feel like I'm fucking America!"

The cast is mostly made up of unprofessionals, scouted by Arnold, but even the more familiar names tell a story of soured American dreams. LaBeouf was a Disney child star who lost his marketable innocence via addiction, scandal and questionable performance art. He channels that chequered persona into a captivating turn as a rough, dangerous charmer, veering between sweetness and aggression. Keough, the villain in a Confederate-flag bikini, is the granddaughter of Elvis Presley, but exudes the steely smugness of a self-made woman, living large off her underlings' labour. Lane, whose scrunched-up face gives a wary edge to her most tender moments, was spotted by Arnold on a beach usually trawled by the producers of adult films. With the camera pinned to her face through most of the film, Lane's naturalistic, often explosive performance crowns *American Honey*'s success.

When Star and Jake first start flirting, she returns his glitter-encased phone to him, sneering, "You like this shiny thing?" Capitalist Jake likes all shiny things (girls, cash, his hoard of stolen treasure) and *American Honey* offers itself up as another prize. Its delicious surface is thanks largely to Robbie Ryan's gorgeous Academy-ratio cinematography, which exploits every source of light for its beauty, from sunshine filtered through gummy bears on a window to fireflies or an oil-well flare. *American Honey* provides as much spectacle as a Hollywood musical, and the crew spend more time singing, rapping or dancing to the radio than conversing. Jake woos Star by turning a supermarket into a rave as he dances to Rihanna's 'We Found Love'; Krystal motivates her team with a call-and-response rap; and the gang find unity singing along to 'American Honey' by Lady Antebellum.

American Honey promises a clear narrative path from the moment it drops in a cutaway to a pair of ruby slippers and Star leaps out of her tree-swing, resolved to leave her home behind and hit the road. With dreadlocks for pigtails and a rucksack instead of a pinafore, Star is a new Dorothy, with the sales team her broken friends seeking completion. Krystal's shimmering outfits and casual cruelty make her the wicked witch. Jake is both a companion and the cyclone, whisking Star into a new world. The closest she comes to returning home, however, is finding a place just like it, an emerald-painted house where the neglected children of an addict mother play unsupervised and the fridge is all but empty. It's something at least. Her peers in the van, who spend their money on booze and drugs as fast as they earn it, are still circling as the film closes.

If *American Honey* has a message it is that dreams are always out of reach. Arnold's cut-in shots of butterflies, birds and bugs failing to take flight reinforce the feeling that something is keeping these young Americans down. Only Star pauses to set the bugs free. And her essential virtue, taking care of neglected children and dreaming of a trailer and family of her own, distinguishes her from her fellow travellers, chasing paper money down the highway. Within a glittering collage of soaring music, soft light and writhing bodies, this brilliant film draws the outline of a bleak economic landscape.

Anarchy! The McLaren Westwood Gang aka The Last Revolution

United Kingdom 2015, Director: Phil Strongman

Reviewed by Mark Sinker

The key to this documentary – its spine, really – is a long, rambling interview with the late Malcolm McLaren. Costermonger spiel, from exaggeration to plain old fibs, is a long-known tool in this provocateur's armoury of self-reportage, and a useful study, in UK punk's 40th year, needs a little pushback on some of it. Instead director Phil Strongman runs it in long, uninterrupted chunks, evidently unwilling to lose any of this precious resource to edit or counter-challenge.

This is a story that primarily valorises pop culture as being 'for the young', and thus a portal of radical activity – and even radical thinking, though thinking is not something the film spends many minutes of its long running time doing. Besides McLaren, it's an overlong vortex of fairly unreliable narrators: mainly middle-aged male talking heads, interesting, amiable or out of their depth, reaffirming notions that mostly had the juice squeezed out of them by around 1981.

Already some knotty questions could be asked: how and why exciting liberatory moments turn into suffocating, back-looking myths; who do cultural disruptions favour more in the long term, the establishment or its discontents? Instead, the film merely breaks up the endless geezers' parade with three things: Sealed Knot-style recreations of famous events (the 1977 'God Save the Queen' jubilee boat trip is here mainly blurry shots of dancing feet); cute young present-day models in Westwood gear of various dates; and laboured historical montage, of the Spanish Civil War and anarchist leader Buenaventura Durruti's funeral in 1936, of atom bomb explosions, of Vietnam and MLK, of Paris in May 1968.

Judging by onscreen time, the Westwood in the title is not Vivienne after all, but Ben, her son by the partner before Malcolm. He's allowed to talk a lot, but only his stories of early family life have much insight. Vivienne obviously sat this project out, and we only hear her in clips from other people's documentaries, to retell at unnecessary length the story of the many-named shop on King's Road, and the rise and fall of the Sex Pistols.

McLaren's 80s work is skimped, not least because the film can't seem to carry an idea in its head for more than a few frames, so the notion is never broached that this allegedly anarchic impresario ever changed mind or direction. Art director and videomaker Nick Egan, a McLaren sidekick during those years, is on hand to enthuse about him. He adores his former boss, but his contribution mostly takes the form of heatedly attacking arguments that no one in the film has actually made. Conspicuous by their absence alongside Vivienne are such wounded one-time McLaren collaborators as Rotten, Jones and Jamie Reid, Annabella Lwin of Bow Wow Wow and any of the South African musicians whose sound was co-opted for the *Duck Rock* LP. Only Adam and some ex-Ants turn up, to talk us through the good and the bad of having MM as manager.

As a valedictory flourish, Egan claims, "there's nothing you touch or look at in advertising, on billboards or on TV today that isn't somehow due to Malcolm breaking down cultural walls." Well, maybe – it's a big claim! – but isn't this quite a long way away from the heritage of Durruti and Debord? Shouldn't we be joining some of these wayward dots? Tracey Emin takes us back to McLaren's 1999 mayoral run to discuss him as someone who always celebrated London as London: in a film so rich in cockney urchin twang, this idea too is worth tracking back through the King Mob years.

Eulogising poor dead Sid, McLaren proclaims him the pioneer of what he calls "participation culture": the idea that anyone can and should get up and just DO IT. Just how good an idea was this? After all, it's why we end up with Egan making the case (quite badly) for latter-day McLaren, rather than a cultural historian or critic or any other kind of better-distanced expert. These anecdotes and observations are all very well, but don't we also need someone to step up and say, "What no one noticed in all this is such-and-such..." McLaren and Westwood were fascinating people engaged on an intense, contradictory project – but we're going to need a less admiring slog than this to achieve more than momentary glimpses of what was valuable about it, and what not.

Anarchy! The McLaren Westwood Gang

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Phil Strongman
Frank Malone
Written by
Phil Strongman
Camera
Marc Coker
Barbara Doux
Daniel Wyszynski
Editor
Jon Nathan
Set Design
Annette Parry
Rachel Szmukler
Theodora Ho
Original Music
Kuba D
Sound
Jakub Dziewa
Costumes
Gabrielle Milanese
Mariko Tokyo

©PS Films
Production Companies
PS Films in association with J-Rec Films presents
A film by Phil Strongman

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
MusicFilmNetwork

End credits title
Anarchy! McLaren Westwood Gang aka Last Revolution

The story of music impresario and Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren and fashion designer Vivienne Westwood is retold, via interviews, clips from earlier documentaries, found footage and recreations.

Blood Father

USA/France 2015
Director: Jean-François Richet
Certificate 15 88m 10s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

Blood Father is another post-*Taken* vehicle for an ageing actor playing a former killer forced into feats of long-renounced violence on behalf of his child. Casting Mel Gibson in the lead role lends an extra charge: introduced as a keeping-sober alcoholic stocking up on guns, ammo, bubblegum and cigarettes, John Link is very much a character in the onscreen/offscreen Mad Mel lineage. The film repeatedly refers to his difficult past, in a way that's far too blunt to qualify as subtext. Ever game, Gibson gives it his troublesomely charismatic all and unleashes a signature growl for the fans.

Aided immensely by Benoît Debie's smoothly glossy cinematography, Gibson's previous star vehicle, 2012's *Get the Gringo*, leveraged his mania for guilty-pleasure entertainment. But Jean-François Richet's film is a far more slapdash effort, essentially consisting of a series of set pieces in which, after some preliminary narrative-development throat-clearing, one cheap set after another is destroyed. John's daughter Lydia is, as written, a terribly annoying character whose main function is to scream and whine, but Erin Moriarty's performance doesn't help: her wide-eyed reaction shots of terror make her look as if she's auditioning for the lead in a motion-capture remake of *Bambi*. The introduction of William H. Macy as John's long-time Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor briefly suggests the possibility of a new, weird variant on the buddy comedy, but Macy quickly disappears. While Gibson's performance is admirably open and unsparing ("This shit's a party for a dirtbag like me," he convincingly notes), the film provides no support.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Chris Briggs
Peter Craig
Pascal Caucheteux
Sebastien K. Lemercier
Screenplay
Peter Craig
Andrea Berloff
Based on the novel by Peter Craig
Director of Photography
Robert Gantz
Edited by
Steven Rosenblum
Production Designer
Robb Wilson King
Music
Sven Faulconer
Re-recording Mixer
Tony Lamberti
Costume Designer
Terry Anderson
Stunt Co-ordinator
Jimmy Romano

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Production Companies
Lionsgate presents in association with Why Not Productions and Wild Bunch a Why Not Productions and Wild Bunch film
Executive Producer
Jennifer Roth

Cast

Mel Gibson
John Link
Erin Moriarty
Lydia
Diego Luna
Jonah
Michael Parks
preacher
Dale Dickey
Cherise
Thomas Mann
Jason, motel clerk
Miguel Sandoval
Arturo Rios
Ryan Dorsey
Shamrock
Richard Cabral
Joker
Daniel Moncada
Cheop
Raoul Trujillo
the Cleaner
William H. Macy
Kirby

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)

California, the present. Reformed alcoholic John Link is contacted by his estranged daughter Lydia, who is being pursued by gang members following her boyfriend's theft of drug money. He kills nearly all her pursuers, the rest are arrested, and John reconciles with his daughter.

Bridget Jones's Baby

USA/France/United Kingdom/People's Republic of China/Japan 2016
Director: Sharon Maguire
Certificate 15 122m 41s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

For a production first announced in 2009, *Bridget Jones's Baby* has had an extraordinarily long gestation period. But 12 years after the underwhelming sequel *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, the eponymous singleton is back, now in her forties, gently satirising the trend for 'geriatric mothers' and yet again torn between two lovers. However, the franchise's longstanding romantic rivalry of the stuffed-shirt versus the charming cad is as dead as Daniel Cleaver, whose funeral packed with sobbing fashion models forms the film's sly opener. Instead, Bridget experiences in quick succession a drunken dalliance with an American stranger and a bittersweet night with long-time ex-lover Mark Darcy. She is unable to know which of them has fathered the baby she accidentally conceives, and so finds her pregnancy enlivened by the rivalry of uptight Brit Darcy and laidback Yank Jack Qwant (Patrick Dempsey), a dating-website billionaire.

This emotional tug of war is a key component of the Bridget Jones romcom template, to which the latest instalment cleaves tightly, for fear of disappointing the faithful. A game, self-deprecating diary voiceover, sequences of Bridget as a rebellious daughter, slapstick date, workplace klutz: they're all slotted neatly into place, every scene carefully underlined with mood-semaphoring pop classics such as 'I'm Every Woman'.

Director Sharon Maguire keeps the tone perky and agreeably knowing, and puts enough emphasis on the film's prettily posh parties, photogenic heritage settings and giggly, sweary English chat to locate it firmly in Curtisland. For once, though, the script has no Richard Curtis input, with Helen Fielding, Dan Mazer and Emma Thompson instead providing a cheerful if scrappy sitcom-inflected scenario. Playing a brisk obstetrician roped into Bridget's initial plot to make both men believe they're the father, Thompson is one of the film's small delights – especially when urging prospective fathers away from 'the business end' of childbirth: "My ex-husband said it was like watching his favourite pub burn down."

Diary products: Sally Phillips, Renée Zellweger

Renée Zellweger, who brings Judy Holliday-ish vulnerability and a slightly crumpled charm to the older Bridget, provides the warmth that allows the film to skim over its flimsy plotting and contrivances. Stringing along two prospective baby-fathers out of sheer embarrassment, she's clumsily endearing rather than calculating or desperate, the mood more *Mamma Mia!* than *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*. Dempsey, best known as *Grey's Anatomy*'s all-American heartthrob 'Dr McDreamy', is a nimble enough light comedian to be a decent foil to Firth's earnest Darcy. Their rivalry is a one-note samba, however, save for some choice slapstick when the vastly pregnant Bridget gets wedged in a revolving hospital door.

Despite its distinct predictability, the film musters enough panache and engaging performances to satisfy the large and loyal brigade of Bridget fans. Like *Sex and the City*, *Magic Mike*, *Mamma Mia!* and *Absolutely Fabulous*, this is a movie whose core appeal lies squarely in the girls' night out. Its audience is heavily invested in Bridget, however shopworn the film's scenario, and eager for a feelgood collective experience. Even at the press preview the gasps and cheers were at hen-party volume, from a largely female audience delighted to be keeping up with the Jones.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Tim Bevan
Eric Fellner
Debra Hayward
Screenplay
Helen Fielding
Dan Mazer
Emma Thompson
Based on the characters and story created by Helen Fielding
Director of Photography
Andrew Dunn
Editor
Melanie Ann Oliver
Production Designer
John Paul Kelly
Music
Craig Armstrong
Sound Designer
Glenn Freemantle
Costume Designer
Steven Noble

©Universal Studios, StudioCanal SA and Miramax Film NY, LLC
Production Companies
Universal Pictures, StudioCanal and Miramax present in association with Perfect World Pictures a Working Title production
Presented in association with Dentsu Inc./Fuji Television Network, Inc.
Executive Producers
Amelia Granger
Liza Chasin
Helen Fielding

Cast

Renée Zellweger
Bridget Jones
Colin Firth
Mark Darcy
Patrick Dempsey
Jack Qwant
Jim Broadbent
dad
Gemma Jones
mum
Emma Thompson
Dr Rawlings
Sally Phillips
Shazzer
Julian Rhind-Tutt
Fergus
Shirley Henderson
Jude
Ben Willbond
Giles
Paul Bentall
minister

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures International UK & Eire

London, present day. Attending the funeral of ex-lover Daniel Cleaver, single 43-year-old TV producer Bridget meets former lover Mark Darcy. She has a one-night stand at Glastonbury with an American stranger. Bridget and Mark are unexpectedly paired as godparents, and sleep together. A pregnant Bridget doesn't know who has fathered her child. She offers to overhaul her news programme, to keep her job. The American stranger turns out to be dating-website billionaire Jack Qwant. Bridget covertly has him questioned on her 'Hard News' programme. Both men think they are the father, until they meet at Bridget's disastrous TV presentation. They go through the antenatal process as a threesome, complicated by male rivalry. Bridget becomes estranged from her mother over the pregnancy. Jack manoeuvres Mark out of the picture. Bridget is torn between the two men. Bridget and her mother are reconciled. Bridget is sacked for messing up an on-air interview. Mark misses Bridget, and goes to tell her that he loves her, irrespective of her baby's parentage. When she goes into labour, they are stranded in a traffic jam. Mark and Jack team up to carry Bridget to hospital on foot. Bridget gives birth to a son. At her wedding a year later to Mark, Jack is best man.

Call of Heroes

Director: Benny Chan
Certificate 15 119m 25s

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Benny Chan and his large team of writers have been looking at Westerns, from *High Noon* to *Once Upon a Time in the West*. They know their *wuxia* genre history well and they've plundered it freely, but *Call of Heroes* (the Chinese title *Wei Cheng* means 'Town in Peril') is first and foremost a pastiche Western, complete with a pastiche Morricone score from Wong Kin-Wai. As Chinese pastiches of Westerns go it's not as original or inspired as He Ping's great *Shuangqizhen Daoke* (*The Swordsman in Double-flag Town*, 1991), but it's certainly more fun than anything in the recent glut of CGI action-fantasies from the merged sector of the China and Hong Kong film industries.

It's very unusual to set a *wuxia* story in the 'warlord era', right after Sun Yatsen's revolution of 1911, and the film finesses its mix of sword'n'spear action and gunplay with some aplomb. The warlord Cao Ying himself doesn't appear, but is represented on screen by his psychotic son Shaolun (Louis Koo, his insouciant cruelty seemingly channelling Inagaki Goro's performance as the out-of-control Naritsugu in Miike's remake of *13 Assassins*), whose particular villainy is established very early on when he kills an innkeeper, a woman teacher and an orphaned child, all without a second thought. Shaolun's idiosyncratic strategy for taking the town of Pucheng entails getting himself arrested and imprisoned – as the pretext for a later reprisal massacre. This brings him up against Sheriff Yang (Lau Ching-Wan, newly christened 'Sean Lau'), a family man of steadfast, stolid probity who bases every official action – including his own resignation – on the perceived will of the people.

Yang's wife (Yuan Quan) is a bit of a token female fighting presence, but the film's range of good guys is enormously enhanced by Eddie Peng's Ma Feng, an eccentric wanderer (clearly a descendant of Drunken Cat in King Hu's *Come Drink with Me*) who takes sides only when he realises that the showdown will allow him to settle an old score. The bad guys are also vividly

Sean Lau Ching-Wan, Shi Yanneng

sketched: Shaolun's lieutenant Zhang Yi (Wu Jing, billed as the guest star) is the cocksure just-following-orders type, a ruthless pragmatist who gets his comeuppance in a duel atop a mountain of crumbling wine-jars, and Pucheng's resident fatcat Liao, who favours appeasing the oppressor and treacherously sets out to entrap the sheriff, is rewarded for his machinations with multiple stabs to his corpulent chest. Shaolun himself is beaten by Sheriff Yang and his wife and deputies but ignominiously finished off – in a small triumph for the film's underlying pro-democracy stance – by 'the people', using farm implements.

Benny Chan has been doing this kind of thing since he started directing *wuxia* serials for TVB in the mid-1980s; he's survived several stints with Jackie Chan and has such hits as *New Police Story* (*Xin Jingcha Gushi*, 2004) and *Shaolin* (*Xin Shaolin Si*, 2011) to his credit. He's a perfectly capable genre director, but it must be said that his visual ideas lack flair and personality. The best creative work here has gone into the characterisations, especially Shaolun's slightly effete villainy and Ma Feng's laidback vanity and charm. That, and of course Sammo Hung's action choreography, most of it performed live, without CGI assists.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Benny Chan
Alvin Lam
Written by
Benny Chan
Doug Wong
Tam Wai-chin
Tim Tong
Chien I-chueh
Director of Photography
Pakie Chan
Editor
Yau Chi-wai
Art Direction
Ben Lau
Music
Wong Kin-Wai
Action Choreographer
Sammo Hung

Production Companies
Universe Entertainment presents a Universe Entertainment production in association with Bona Film Group Co., Sun Entertainment Culture, iQiyi Motion Pictures, Yinming Culture Communication Co., Long Motion Pictures, Alpha Pictures (Beijing) Co., CL Motion Pictures, Beijing Monster Pictures Co., Zhejiang Viewguide Film Co.
Executive Producer
Daneil Lam

Cast

Sean Lau Ching-Wan
Sheriff Yang Kenan
Louis Koo
Cao Shaolun
Eddie Peng
Ma Feng
Yuan Quan
Yang's wife
Jiang Shuying
Bai Ling
Wu Jing
Zhang Yi
Liu Kai-chi
Liao

Dolby Digital
In Colour and Black & White
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Asia Releasing

Chinese theatrical title
Wei Cheng

Southern China, 1914. Warlord Cao Ying sends an army headed by his psychotic son Cao Shaolun to take control of towns in his region, causing floods of refugees across the countryside. Ahead of his force, Cao Shaolun enters the town of Pucheng (which is defended by Sheriff Yang Kenan and a small team of guards) and randomly kills three people, one of them a child. Yang duly arrests and jails him; the townspeople endorse a death sentence. Wanderer Ma Feng (who allows his horse Taiping to guide his travels) takes a casual interest in these events but gets involved when he realises that Cao Shaolun's army is headed by his former classmate-rival Zhang Yi. Ma helps Yang to defeat two officers who sneak in to spring Cao Shaolun from jail. When local rich man Liao rallies the townspeople to demand Cao's release, Yang resigns as sheriff and sends his wife and child to safety. The freed Cao launches a murderous reign of terror (one of his first victims is Liao), but Yang, Ma and the surviving guards fight back; Yang's wife returns to help. Ma defeats Zhang in a spectacular duel; Yang and the others beat Cao, who is finished off with farm implements by vengeful townspeople. Ma resumes his wandering.

The Comedian's Guide to Survival

United Kingdom 2016, Director: Mark Murphy

Reviewed by Leigh Singer

The underrated and largely forgotten 1988 Hollywood comedy *Punchline*, with Sally Field and Tom Hanks as rival fledgling stand-ups, had the simple but effective tagline: "Dying is easy – comedy is hard." For many, the thought of tempting public humiliation on stage in an all-or-nothing gambit – a group of strangers either find you funny or they don't – is tantamount to a fate worse than death. Yet at the same time, such high-wire risk, for the pure, even noble motive of bringing people together in laughter, has a perverse, life-affirming thrill.

Such a burning sense of mission is almost entirely absent from this lacklustre comedy, which is based on the experiences of James Mullinger, a British *GQ* comedy editor who plugged away on the stand-up circuit before finally making it. The film begins with Mullinger (James Buckley of *The Inbetweeners*) in the doldrums, and in its rush to detail the horrors of low-rent, low-paid pub-and-club gigs, his morose, self-pitying monologues come across as singularly unsympathetic. Worse, he seems not just uninteresting but *uninterested* in the essence of what makes other people laugh and, thus, makes them tick. When he is assigned to produce a major comedy feature for his magazine and interviews numerous high-profile stand-ups (the likes of Gilbert Gottfried, Gina Yashere and Omid Djalili appear as themselves), his indulgent defeatism reveals him to be a terrible interlocutor and observer of human foibles – major shortcomings for an aspiring humorist.

Sadly, this goes hand in hand with the film's other, even more crucial deficiency: a worrying dearth of decent jokes. The real-life cameos elicit a handful of amusing put-downs, though it's hard to imagine that these didn't derive from the guest comedians' own ad-libs. A running breaking-the-fourth-wall gag and Kevin Eldon as a US chauffeur grappling with the concept of British sarcasm do connect, but Mullinger's own onstage routines are strangely second-rate and derivative. And contributions from usually reliable support, including Mark Heap as a redneck trucker and Vas Blackwood as allegedly the world's greatest stand-up, are dismayingly wobbly.

This flimsiness extends to the basic

The day the clown died: James Buckley

narrative, too. Comic redemption somehow comes from a randomly filmed improv at a remote desert diner, which goes viral. A failed corporate gig somehow lands our hero a prestigious spot at a major festival. A high-profile magazine (*GQ* here rechristened *COQ*) somehow opts to use his phone selfie as its cover image. If these incidents are indeed taken from Mullinger's own history, we owe him an apology for mocking them; if not, the film owes its audience one for such slapdash contrivances.

Add in pat, greetings-card life lessons from the eponymous guide and the overall effect is an unappealing mix of calculating cynicism and cheap sentiment. It's genuinely gratifying to know that in reality Mullinger (who cameos here as Hollywood star Brad Macey) has made a success of his stand-up dreams, but all the more baffling that this fictionalised version falls so short. Comedy is hard but *The Comedian's Guide* makes it look nigh on impossible.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Alan Latham
Mark Murphy
Written by
Mark Murphy
Based on *Don't Give Up the Day Job* by Mark Murphy, James Mullinger
Director of Photography
Joan Bordera
Editor
Dragos Teglas
Production Designer
Tony Noble
Music Composer/ Music Produced by
Simone Vallecorsa
Sound Mixer
Simon Hornett
Costume Designer
David C. Brown

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Production Companies
GSP Studios and Solar Productions in association with Red Rock Entertainment present a Mark Murphy film
Executive Producers
James Buckley
Gary Collins
Peter Bates
Paul Ward
David Rogers
Jason Garrett
Kirsty Bell
Richard Seel
Norman Merry

Cast
James Buckley
James Mullinger
MyAnna Buring
Nell
Paul Kaye
Phillip
Tim McInnerny
corporate boss
Gilbert Gottfried
himself
Kevin Eldon
Nick Secker
Omid Djalili
himself
James Mullinger
Brad Macey
Vas Blackwood
Dustin Stratford
Gina Yashere
herself

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Signature Entertainment

UK, present day. Aspiring stand-up comedian James Mullinger is struggling to make an impact playing to hostile crowds in tiny venues. When he wets himself during a gig and a clip of this goes viral, his wife decides she's had enough. His bullying magazine editor boss issues an ultimatum: give up the distracting stand-up ventures or face the sack. Given the task of interviewing famous international comedians for a special issue of the magazine, Mullinger diverts the questions to his own fledgling career, pitching jokes and soliciting advice. To secure the cover feature – an interview with elusive stand-up superstar Dustin Stratford – he travels to the US. He spends a day with Hollywood comedy star Brad Macey, who encourages him to keep going with his dream – and then strands him in the desert as a lesson in perseverance. A hitchhiking encounter with a trucker subsequently leaves Mullinger robbed and stripped on the roadside. Channelling his frustrations, he performs an impromptu gig at a nearby diner. A customer films it, and the footage proves an online hit. He visits Stratford at his home, inadvertently getting both the cover feature and igniting his stand-up career by playing at Montreal's prestigious Just For Laughs comedy festival.

Deepwater Horizon

USA 2016
Director: Peter Berg
Certificate 12A 107m 34s

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

"Hope is not a tactic," says Mark Wahlberg's pragmatic 'little person' to a venal higher-up early on in *Deepwater Horizon*. He's referring to the negligent decisions that in 2010 contributed to fiery catastrophe on the titular offshore drilling rig, a disaster that left 11 workers dead and sent million of gallons of oil gushing into the Gulf of Mexico (the worst such spill in US history). Director Peter Berg's dramatisation of the incident is, following his 2013 Afghanistan-set *Lone Survivor*, another muscular true-life account of individual and collective heroism against daunting odds. But where the former film's threat came in human form (Taliban insurgents), the chief antagonist here is ferocious Mother Nature. What marks both is a high-octane striving for verisimilitude, which, while arresting in its bruising physicality, ultimately leaves the business of fleshing out characters playing second fiddle.

Drawn from a *New York Times* article, Matthew Sand and Matthew Michael Carnahan's script centres on Mike Williams (Wahlberg), a no-nonsense technician who proved instrumental in helping stricken colleagues escape to safety from the doomed rig. The disaster itself is neatly foreshadowed by Mike's daughter, whose recreation of her father's workplace for a school project – using a soda can, straw and surging foam – is made ominous by low rumblings on the sound mix. Once aboard the rig, a terse standoff ensues between employees and a visiting delegation of smirking BP contractors over the decision to forgo certain safety tests prior to drilling. Mike and his boss Jimmy Harrell (Kurt Russell) find themselves butting heads with reptilian executive Donald Vidrine (John Malkovich), who reacts with a combination of irritation and bemused curiosity to the men's grave concerns. The steady increasing of unease in this preamble is absorbing enough, though Malkovich's leering, bug-eyed, thickly accented performance threatens to unmoor the resolutely naturalistic tone that's been established. As the tension builds on deck, so too does the dangerous pressure on the ocean floor, a parallel seized on by Berg as he crosscuts between the two. When Vidrine's actions usher in a calamitous pressure blowout, the film shifts into a different gear altogether and remains there.

Berg's fortissimo rendering of the resulting elemental fury, as the crew are consumed by geysering mud and raging fire, is certainly impressive to behold. The construction of a gigantic set modelled on the actual rig provides large measures of visceral authenticity, while intrusive CGI is deployed sparingly. As in the brutal *Lone Survivor*, the fragility of human bodies is keenly felt. When the first explosions rock the rig, the showering Russell is sent ricocheting around his bathroom cubicle like a pinball. Another man topples to his death in an act of self-sacrifice, but seconds before gazes awestruck into the hellish, beautiful conflagration. Enrique Chediak's highly mobile camera makes the most of the chaos, regularly swooping into the ocean depths and inside the rig's pipes as they buckle under the pressure.

Yet while Berg is in his element with the clamorous action, he's on shakier ground with fashioning resonant human drama amid the din. Wahlberg and Russell both turn in solid performances, but Gina Rodriguez doesn't have nearly enough to do as a frustrated colleague; Kate Hudson, meanwhile, has a few desultory scenes as Mike's tearful wife, anxiously awaiting news from home. Put plainly, these characters – whether it's Wahlberg's saintly man of action or Malkovich's cowardly corporate villain – just don't possess enough dimensions as written. It's a deficiency that leaves *Deepwater Horizon* triumphing as harrowing spectacle but lacking in emotional clout.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Lorenzo di Bonaventura
Mark Vahradian
Mark Wahlberg
Stephen Levinson
David Womark
Screenplay
Matthew Michael Carnahan
Matthew Sand
Screen Story
Matthew Sand
Based upon an article by David Barstow, David Rohde, Stephanie Saul published in The New York Times
Director of Photography
Enrique Chediak
Editors
Colby Parker Jr
Gabriel Fleming
Production Designer
Chris Seagers
Music
Steve Jablonsky
Sound Designer
Wylie Stateman
Costume Designer
Kasia Walicka Maimone
Visual Effects
Industrial Light & Magic
Iloura
Supervising Stunt Co-ordinator
Kevin Scott

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Production Companies
Summit Entertainment and Participant Media present a di Bonaventura Pictures, Closest to the Hole, Leverage Entertainment production
A Peter Berg film
Executive Producers
Jeff Skoll
Jonathan King

Cast
Mark Wahlberg
Mike Williams
Kurt Russell
Jimmy Harrell
John Malkovich
Donald Vidrine
Gina Rodriguez
Andrea Fleytas
Dylan O'Brien
Caleb Holloway
Kate Hudson
Felicia Williams
Douglas M. Griffin
Landry
James DuMont
O'Bryan
Joe Chrest
Sims
Brad Leland
Kaluza
Dave Maldonado
Kuchta
JD Evermore
Dewey A. Revette
Ethan Suplee
Jason Anderson
Jason Pine
Stephen Ray Curtis
Jason Kirkpatrick
Aaron Dale Burkeen
Robert Walker Branchaud
Doug Brown
Jonathan Angel
Gordon Jones

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

Gulf of Mexico, 2010. Electrical technician Mike Williams reports for duty on the Deepwater Horizon oil rig. He is surprised to find many of the rig's systems in a state of disrepair, but this issue is glossed over by BP supervisor Donald Vidrine. Mike's boss Jimmy Harrell clashes with Vidrine over the decision to forgo structural safety tests prior to the commencement of drilling. When abnormal pressure levels are registered, Vidrine dismisses the crew's concerns. Soon afterwards, a blowout caused by a build-up of methane, mud and seawater causes multiple explosions on the rig. Mike and Jimmy remain on the rig to help wounded survivors, while Vidrine and his colleagues rush to the lifeboat. Jimmy and other survivors narrowly escape on an emergency dinghy. As the burning rig begins to sink, Mike and deck officer Andrea Fleytas jump to safety.

De Palma

USA 2016
Directors: Noah Baumbach, Jake Paltrow
Certificate 15 109m 45s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

A fireside chat without the fire. A masterclass in filmmaking taught without notes. An uncensored post-mortem of a blood-soaked career. There are perhaps a dozen other pithy aperçus that could elucidate the charms and shortcomings of Jake Paltrow and Noah Baumbach's documentary, but their joint effort deserves more than a wink and a smile because, well, it's Brian De Palma. Opening with some thoughts on that great foundational text *Vertigo* (1958), the director narrates his life in chronological order directly to the camera, made to seem as though everything we're seeing/hearing was captured in a single afternoon. (In fact, more than 30 hours of interview footage were shot.)

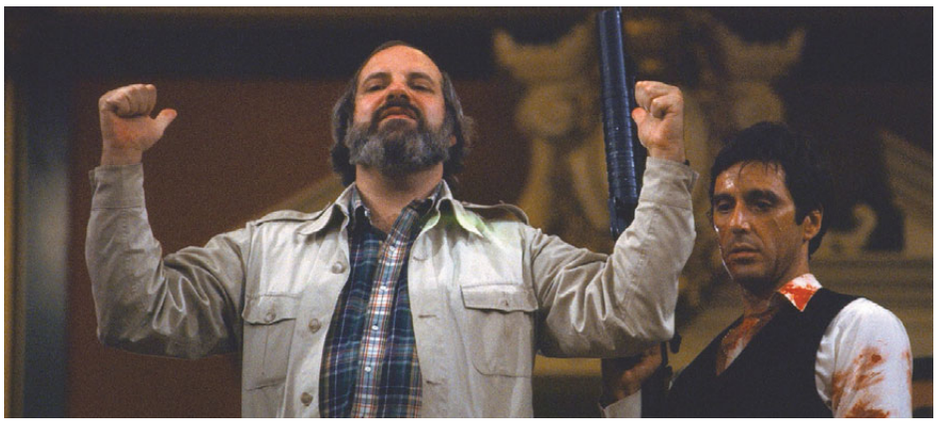
This conceit adds an air of familiarity and casualness to the proceedings, bolstered by the friendship between the co-directors and their subject, directly acknowledged at one point as "you guys". (The documentary was the outgrowth of the trio's semi-regular dinners together, and a breadth of filmmaking experience and wit they deemed too good to keep to themselves.) Yet for fans already well versed in De Palma's oeuvre and the auteurist fables behind it, there's not much terra incognita. On a purely informational level, the film offers a practical outline, with precedence given to professional details, juicy (Orson Welles not learning his lines for *Get to Know Your Rabbit*, Bernard Herrmann's violent reaction to the temp track for *Sisters*, Vilmos Zsigmond's objections to Cliff Robertson's tacky tan, Robert De Niro not learning his lines for *The Untouchables*) or otherwise (how *Carrie* got him back into the graces of New Hollywood executives), with some filmmaking advice peppered in. Even the movies De Palma expresses a greater affection for (such as the globetrotting, sexy telekinetic-teen thriller *The Fury*, 1978) are downplayed for better-known or more technologically dazzling films like *Body Double* (1984) or *Carlito's Way* (1993). Most criminally, there's very little on latter-day tour de force *Femme Fatale* (2002), only a quick gloss on *The Black Dahlia* (2006) and *Redacted* (2007), and nothing but a clip of his most recent splitscreen/touchscreen fantasia *Passion* (2012).

For a documentary that's seemingly revelling in the fact that its subject is free from the glad-handing and expectations of the Hollywood system (he can finally speak freely about what *really* happened), the filmmakers seem uninterested in exploring what that means in practical terms for his art. Does having creative freedom outweigh the disadvantages of working with smaller budgets? Is it as satisfying to make films without the kind of massive, meticulously planned third-act action set pieces he was able to deliver in *Carlito's Way* or *Mission: Impossible* (1996)? De Palma does offer a brief, somewhat misleading pronouncement about why action sequences today are visually lacking ("It's all pre-visualised... all these little things they have in their computers"), but that's the only real moment of movies-then-versus-now reflection; Paltrow and Baumbach's relentless march through time doesn't really allow for such questions to be posed.

However, for the uninitiated, there's both the pleasure of discovery and De Palma's passionate delivery – regardless of what you might think about the content of his films, the man can really tell a story, and it's invigorating to hear the Movie Brats' reign told from an insider's perspective. The more personal stuff is doled out sparingly but always manages to pack a punch, and helps to complicate – or, if you take a more laissez-faire approach to murder by giant drill bits, disavow – notions of his remorseless misogyny. After insisting that women in trouble are inherently cinematic and fascinating to follow around at a distance (à la gallery scene in *Vertigo*), he talks about his parents' unhappy marriage, which was worsened by his father's infidelity ("I lived in a family full of these incredible egotists who were totally oblivious to the damage they were doing...") and how it made him want to defend his younger brother, who felt traumatised by the surrounding chaos. (This injurious history is also discussed in relation to 1980's *Dressed to Kill*: De Palma recounts the time he surveilled and followed his father to his office in order to confront him about having a mistress, and then searched the premises until he found her hiding in a closet.)

Understanding that his films are preoccupied with delivering some sense of justice in an unjust world – and are therefore willing to satirise and deconstruct liberal values as much as conservative ones – is an insight that is often downplayed or overlooked in more conventional auteurist considerations of his work. Although this theme is immediately identifiable in *The Untouchables* (1987) and *Casualties of War* (1989), it's oftentimes masked by his caustic sense of humour. (What better way to satirise the mid-80s synergetic need for movie-themed music videos than to insert one into the porno in *Body Double*? It was clearly lost on many at the time – the film was nominated for a 'Worst Director' Razzie.) The driving force of early features such as *Greetings* (1968) or *Hi, Mom!* (1970), these comedic impulses took on more diverse forms in *Scarface* (1983), *Body Double* and *Snake Eyes* (1998) – films that are united by that same desire to comment on the bitter contradictions of contemporary society, but are executed across very different narratives.

While Paltrow and Baumbach never explicitly argue for the value of De Palma's work in an increasingly polarised media landscape, preferring instead to highlight his formal and technical prowess (which, as the film convincingly argues, carries forward a visual language pioneered by Hitchcock), allowing the director to speak for himself for 110 minutes makes the case in a way that is powerful – and plain enough – to see. S



Look who's stalking: Brian De Palma, Al Pacino

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Noah Baumbach
Jake Paltrow
Edited by
Lauren Minnerath
Matt Mayer
Re-recording Mixer
Paul Hsu

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Executive Producers
Scott Rudin
Eli Bush
Film Extracts
Woton's Wake (1962)
The Wedding Party (1969)
The Responsive Eye (1966)
Murder à la Mod (1967)
Greetings (1968)
Dionysus in '69 (1970)
Hi, Mom! (1969)
Get to Know Your Rabbit (1972)
Sisters (1972)
Phantom of the Paradise (1974)
Obsession (1976)
Carrie (1976)
The Fury (1978)
Home Movies (1980)
Dressed to Kill (1980)
Blow Out (1981)
Scarface (1983)
Body Double (1984)
Wise Guys (1986)
The Untouchables (1987)
Casualties of War (1989)
The Bonfire of the Vanities (1990)
Raising Cain (1992)
Carlito's Way (1993)
Mission Impossible (1996)
Snake Eyes (1998)
Mission to Mars (2000)
Femme Fatale (2002)
The Black Dahlia (2005)
Redacted (2007)
Passion (2013)
Vertigo (1958)
À bout de souffle/ Breathless (1960)
Les Bonnes Femmes (1960)
La Chinoise ou plutôt À la chinois (1967)
Week End (1967)
Barry Lyndon (1975)
Psycho (1960)
The Phantom of the Opera (1925)
Mean Streets (1973)
North by Northwest (1959)
Taxi Driver (1976)
"Don't Look Now" (1973)
Our Time (1974)
Deliverance (1972)
Manhattan (1979)
Fiddler on the Roof (1971)
One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975)
Rocky (1976)
Carrie (2013)
The Rage Carrie 2 (1999)
The French Connection (1971)
Blowup (1966)
Scarface (1983)
Scarface (1932)
The Hand (1981)
Flashdance (1983)
Sex World (1977)
Fatal Attraction (1987)
Silverado (1985)
Mona Lisa (1986)
Bronenosets Potemkin/Battleship Potemkin (1925)
Harry and the Hendersons (1987)
The Best Years of Our Lives (1946)
The Magnificent Ambersons (1942)
Sweet Smell of Success (1957)
Strangers on a Train (1951)
Rear Window (1954)

With
Brian De Palma

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

An extended interview with Brian De Palma talking directly to the camera, shot in co-director Jake Paltrow's apartment over what appears to be a single afternoon. This chronological overview of De Palma's career, which includes insights into his work from his earliest student films up to 2007's 'Redacted', is interspersed with extended clips as well as alternate adaptations of his 1976 feature 'Carrie' and work by Alfred Hitchcock and Orson Welles.

Don't Breathe

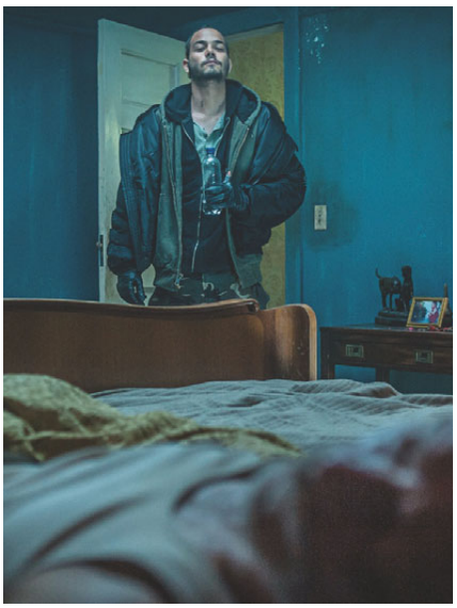
USA 2015
Director: Fede Alvarez
Certificate 15 88m 23s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

In the world of Fede Alvarez's suspenseful home-invasion thriller *Don't Breathe*, everyone – whether ostensibly a victim or victimiser – is guilty of *something*, and the worst actions are always driven by what you could call love. Tough blonde chick Rocky (Jane Levy, from Alvarez's *Evil Dead* remake) hooks up with a guy who is obviously not on her level with the long-term plan of getting her sister away from their irresponsible addict mother and her latest loser boyfriend. Callow tagalong Alex (Dylan Minnette, scarcely more grown-up than in *Goosebumps*) betrays his struggling single father by stealing security access codes from his firm because he is carrying a heavy torch for Rocky, and even puts up with constant needling about it from would-be dangerous loose cannon Money (Daniel Zovatto, from *It Follows*), who is of course the first to die when their home invasion goes wrong. And Nordstrom (leathery Stephen Lang), their victim-cum-tormentor, has rigged up his house as an inescapable torture-porn dungeon in the desperate hope that he can get the woman who killed his daughter to provide a replacement child.

Like *It Follows*, *Only Lovers Left Alive* and *Lost River*, Alvarez's film – though shot mostly in Hungary – makes use of the recent image of Detroit as an abandoned city: Nordstrom's fortified house is the only inhabited dwelling in a suburban neighbourhood depopulated by economic reversals that are the subtext for the young criminals' desperate measures. In *It Follows*, parents were mysteriously absent, but here they're presences to be exploited, robbed or escaped; the pitting of kids against a grown-up harks back to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), though the fact that the trio come to the villain's porch with robbery in mind rather than to ask directions means that our sympathies are skewed, especially since the victim is a blind veteran. Recently, home-invasion thrillers have proliferated – often with handicapped victims turning the tables (*Hush*) – but this is a rare entry in the genre that comes down on the side of the invaders, bringing to mind the twisted fairytale of Wes Craven's *The People Under the Stairs* (1991).

Alvarez paces the story well and skilfully deploys infallible suspense mechanisms, as characters have to keep quiet while the blind monster prowls around in the dark, fixing on the smallest sound. It's less successful when it comes to keeping us on the side of the young crooks – in *The People Under the Stairs*, the invaded home belonged to the oppressive landlords who'd sucked all the money out of the ghetto, but Nordstrom's cash stash has come to him after his family has been broken by a careless, wealthy driver. Lang, who seems less villainous here than in his turns as a space marine in *Avatar* (2009) and the sleazy tabloid journo in *Manhunter* (1986), is a subtler player than the youngsters he's pitted against, and the script even insists that he impregnates his captive through turkey baster rather than rape. Even the vicious dog he sets on Rocky in the effectively drawn-out and sustained finale, where merely escaping the house with the money isn't enough to get away entirely, is ultimately a good dog protecting its devoted master rather than the monster the movie needs it to be.



Risky galore: Stephen Lang, Daniel Zovatto

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Sam Raimi
Rob Tapert
Fede Alvarez
Written by
Fede Alvarez
Rodo Sayagues
Director of Photography
Pedro Luque
Film Editors
Eric L. Beason
Louise Ford
Gardner Gould
Production Designer
Naaman Marshall
Music
Roque Baños
Sound Mixer
Csaba Major
Costume Designer
Carlos Rosario
Stunt Co-ordinator
Béla Unger

©Blind Man Productions, LLC
Production Companies
Screen Gems, Stage 6 Films in association with Ghost House Pictures present a film by Fede Alvarez
Executive Producers
Nathan Kahane
Joe Drake
Erin Westerman
J.R. Young
Mathew Hart

Cast
Jane Levy
Rocky
Dylan Minnette
Alex
Daniel Zovatto
Money
Stephen Lang
Norman Nordstrom, blind man
Emma Bercovici
Diddy
Franciska Töröcsik
Cindy
Olivia Gillies
young Emma, blind man's daughter

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing UK

Detroit, present day. Rocky, a young woman desperate to move to California to better the life chances of her younger sister, teams up with her erratic boyfriend Money to break into empty homes. Alex, who has a crush on Rocky, helps them by stealing alarm access codes from his father, who works for a home-security firm. A fence suggests Money target the home of blind war veteran Norman Nordstrom, who gained a large cash settlement after dropping a court case against the family of Cindy, a rich girl who accidentally killed his daughter. The trio break into Nordstrom's isolated house, but he is a formidable opponent and kills Money with his own gun. In the basement, Rocky and Alex find Cindy; she has been kidnapped by Nordstrom, who has artificially inseminated her to replace his lost child. Nordstrom accidentally kills Cindy, but tries to replace her with Rocky. Alex is killed rescuing Rocky, who escapes with the money. Nordstrom survives, and is hailed as a hero for resisting the intruders – though he doesn't report any theft.

Driving with Selvi

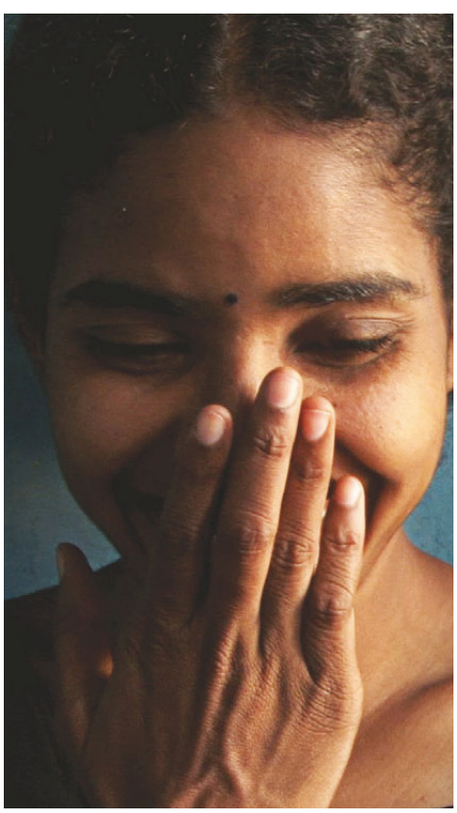
Canada/USA/United Kingdom/India 2015
Director: Elisa Paloschi

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

A survivor story that opts to accentuate the positive, finding hope in the tenacity and kindness of ordinary people, *Driving with Selvi* could have turned out saccharine or preachy. But the sheer charisma of the film's central figure – an abused and prostituted child bride who finds her freedom in the pleasingly literal form of a taxi driver's licence – and the unobtrusive grace with which it observes her makes for something genuinely tender and rousing. Thus a documentary campaigning for the cause of domestic-violence victims in India also asserts itself as a piece of art: a study of a life in the act of unfolding, ten years in the making and never predictable. And if Selvi's evident specialness – her irrepressibly buoyant character, dazzling smile and apparently indestructible sense of self-worth – makes her a particularly compelling subject, it also serves to underline both that such gifts are no defence against the sort of treatment she has borne, and that less glowing and self-confident people face similar punishments without ever catching the eye of a filmmaker or finding the means to escape.

We are jarringly reminded that Selvi's second act isn't the norm when she visits a friend, Usha, with whom she learned to drive when they were both resident at the Odanadi women's shelter in Mysore. Usha is also licensed to drive a taxi, but since they've had children, her husband will not allow her to return to work. A past so unspeakable that she clams up, almost stopping the interview when she is asked about it, has given way to a safer future for Usha, but the freedom to work still eludes her – even though it would provide her family with greater financial security.

Selvi herself, in one of the quirks of fate that



Wheels of fortune: Selvi

led her to describe herself as "a lucky girl" in spite of her bad start, finds a husband, Viji, who is respectful, devoted and happy to marry her without a dowry from her family. "My wife Selvi is much more courageous than me," he says, as Selvi graduates from her taxi work to training to drive heavy goods vehicles. Indeed, a feature of Elisa Paloschi's film is the gentle emphasis it places on good men in Selvi's life: Viji; the 'brothers' who run the shelter and give her the opportunity to drive; and the cousin who seeks her out after she has fled her first marriage, and who ensures some ongoing contact with the blood family that has largely rejected her. A patriarchal system oppresses Selvi and Usha, but individual men can still do good within it. For her neglectful mother, meanwhile, Selvi nurses resentment and sorrow. "I don't wish such a hard-hearted mother on anyone," she says.

Patient, sweet, meandering, yet charged with real anger and determination, Paloschi's self-shot film both captures and elicits powerful feelings. If we feel a gut punch when Selvi reveals exactly what she endured in the course of her first marriage, we're also treated to the sheer joy that flows out of Selvi and Viji on their wedding day. Selvi even proves philosophical enough to note that one experience brought her the other. "If I hadn't married my first husband, I wouldn't be where I am now. In a way I should be thanking him."

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Elisa Paloschi
Cinematographer
Elisa Paloschi
Editors
Dave Kazala
Mahi Rahgozar
Original Music
Ken Myhr
Sound Design
Daniel Pellerin

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Production Companies
Eyesfull presents in association with Chicken & Egg Pictures a film by Elisa Paloschi
Funders: Chicken & Egg Pictures, Bertha BRITDOC Connect Fund, Fledgling Fund, Women in Film Foundation, Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, Toronto Arts Council
Supported by BRITDOC/Good Pitch, Consulate General of Canada, Mumbai, DOC, DOC Institute, High Commission of Canada UK, Indian Documentary Foundation, Indiegogo, Odanadi Seva Samsthe, Thomson Reuters Foundation, USAID, Women Make Movies

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
DocHouse

A documentary covering ten years in the life of Selvi, South India's first female taxi driver. At 18, Selvi is living at a shelter for young women in Mysore, having fled an abusive marriage she was forced into at 14. She is learning to drive. She leaves the shelter, becomes a licensed taxi driver and gives lectures to girls about work and family life. She meets and marries Viji, and they have a daughter, Hariga. Selvi stops driving in order to raise her daughter, but misses her work and plans to return once Hariga is in school. She visits Usha, another trained cab driver from the shelter, who has also married and had children. Usha's husband will not allow her to return to work. Selvi reveals that during her first marriage, she was prostituted by her husband. She goes to see the family members who did not reject her as a result, her aunt and cousin; they are warm towards her. Selvi begins training to drive heavy goods vehicles, and qualifies. As the film ends, Selvi and Viji have been given a truck, which they are using to transport goods across South India; Selvi dreams of a fleet.

Equity

USA 2016
Director: Meera Menon
Certificate 15 100m 11s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

An exploration of the tough, betrayal-ridden life of that rare beast, the she-wolf of Wall Street, *Equity* is a sharp look at corporate misogyny, wrapped in a clumsy thriller. Films about the financial sector with female protagonists have traditionally been comedies such as *Working Girl* (1988) and *I Don't Know How She Does It* (2011), which used banking as a glossy background for love affairs and journeys of self-discovery. But the big deal here is literally a big deal. In order to secure her division's top job, banker Naomi (Anna Gunn) needs to create a showy billion-dollar-raising IPO (initial public offering) for elite encrypted social network Cachet. However, unlike similar male heroes in *Wall Street* (1987) or *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), she's threatened not by her own greed or hubris but by disgruntled male perceptions, having lost a previous IPO deal because she was seen as being abrasive (shades of Hillary Clinton) and "wore an awful dress". Women must beware women, too: Naomi's nervily ambitious VP Erin is plotting her own rise, and government lawyer Samantha is stalking Naomi's insider-trading boyfriend Michael.

Plaiting the women's alliances and betrayals, the narrative neatly upends their expected characterisations, refusing to paint Naomi as a heartless corporate raider, and showing up Samantha's self-centred ruthlessness in pursuit of her case. Erin, a woman willing to flirt with Cachet's CEO in order to seal the deal – despite the fact that she's secretly carrying her husband's baby – is less an 'All About Erin' poisonous protégée than someone grimly determined to make it up the bank's greasy pole.

Director Meera Menon ensures that the pace is fast and the tone unsentimental, shading the film's shiny corporate eyries and blandly luxurious apartments in steely blues and greys. Her direction is tight and unfussy, keeping the mood stern and commendably unmelodramatic. But Amy Fox's script is significantly less

Trade barrier: Anna Gunn

sophisticated, relying on banalities about data hacking ("Snowden, WikiLeaks, the Sony hack – it gets harder and harder to trust people"). Its take on the complexities of financing new-tech IPOs and the role of rumour in tech launches lacks the acute insider's view that TV comedy *Silicon Valley* musters. On top of this, the thriller plotting feels positively gauche compared with the tense, twisty machinations of similar high-finance thrillers such as *Margin Call* (2011) or *Arbitrage* (2012). It asks us to believe that the highly competent Naomi has maintained a 20-year casual affair with James Purefoy's Michael and not got wind of his widely suspected insider trading. And sketching this lairy British charmer as a predictable 'homme fatale' seems rather too pat in a film working hard to overturn female stereotypes. His is the weakest performance, shown up by the harder, hungrier playing of the three women. But it's Gunn's movie, a showcase for her gravitas and the tough, authoritative playing she honed in *Breaking Bad*. Raging at a male minion for giving her only "three motherfucking chocolate chips!" in a cookie, she's a big presence in a small film. But *Equity* is so much more adroit with its issues than with its drama that it becomes little more than a superior TV movie.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Alysia Reiner
Sarah Megan Thomas
Screenplay
Amy Fox
Story
Sarah Megan Thomas
Alysia Reiner
Amy Fox
Director of Photography
Eric Lin
Edited by
Andrew Hafitz
Production Designer
Diane Lederman
Music
Alexis & Sam
Sound Mixer
Tammy Douglas
Costume Designer
Teresa Binder Westby

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Production Companies
Sony Picture Classics presents a Broad Street Pictures film
A production of Broad Street Pictures
Sponsor
Bloomberg L.P.
Executive Producer
Candy Straight

Cast

Anna Gunn
Naomi Bishop
James Purefoy
Michael Connor
Sarah Megan Thomas
Erin Manning
Alysia Reiner
Samantha Ryan
Craig Bierko
Benji Ackers
Margaret Colin
Attorney Cahn
Nate Corddry
Cory
Nick Gehlfuss
Gabe
Carrie Preston
Compliance Officer Abby
Samuel Roukin
Ed
Tracie Thoms
Melanie
Lee Tergesen
Randall
Sophie Von Haselberg
Marin
James Naughton
John

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing UK

New York, present day. High-flying investment banker Naomi Bishop has ambitions to lead her company's global banking division. She wins the pitch to take social network Cachet public on the stock market. Her old college friend Samantha, now a government lawyer investigating banking fraud, renews contact. Naomi's long-time lover Michael, a bank trader secretly selling tips to crooked hedge funder Benji, snoops on her for Cachet information but finds nothing. Erin, Naomi's ambitious vice-president, makes herself invaluable to the Cachet deal. Erin is pregnant but has told no one about this. Cachet coder Marin tells Naomi that the network isn't hacker-proof. Samantha closes in on Michael. Erin discovers that Marin has been sacked. She lets Michael overhear her telling Naomi this, so that Naomi and the IPO will be compromised when he leaks the information. He sells the tip to Benji. Benji leaks Marin's story about Cachet's hacker risk to a website. Naomi confronts Michael about this, but he protests that it's all just a game. Naomi tells Samantha to investigate Erin. At the IPO market opening, the stock price is undermined by the Cachet leak and Benji's company buying shares at a lower price. Naomi loses the global banking job, and is sacked after raging at her boss. Erin takes over Naomi's job. Samantha becomes a corporate lawyer.

Further Beyond

United Kingdom/Ireland 2016
Directors: Christine Molloy, Joe Lawlor

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

Further Beyond takes its title from the sculpture of the Pillars of Hercules in Cádiz, which is inscribed boastfully with the motto '*Plus ultra*' – 'further beyond' – a contraction and contradiction of the '*Non plus ultra*' ('Nothing further beyond') supposedly inscribed on the legendary gates. This new filigree work from Desperate Optimists duo Christine Molloy and Joe Lawlor – a meta-documentary about the making (and unmaking) of a biopic that's also an essay film about migration and memory – follows its putative subject Ambrose O'Higgins further beyond, from Ireland to Spain to Chile (with a detour to New York), remaking its title to refer not to colonial dominance but to a broad, inclusive transnational imagination.

O'Higgins was one of many Irish people to use emigration to escape English colonisers. His family, as the film details, were dispossessed by Cromwell, then worked the land of an English landlord, Baron Langford. Inspired by a medieval history that argued the Hibernians were originally from the Iberian Peninsula, in the 1750s O'Higgins travelled first to Cádiz, where he learned of the Spanish colonies from sailors, then to South America. Renaming himself Ambrosio, Baron of Ballynary, he crossed the Andes to Chile on foot, almost dying in winter snows but surviving to play a role in the formation of the nation (his son Bernardo would become the first governor of independent Chile). His mobility is both constructed and contrasted by fixed-camera landscape cinematography, moving postcards that query the relation of human to place and question the role of dramatic action at the centre of conventional filmmaking.

As the voiceover narration points out, the dynamic and well-known Chilean portion of O'Higgins's history would be the smart choice for a conventional biopic: an opening shot of a man surveying snowy peaks combines the Romantic *Rückenfigur* with the heroic adventurer of films such as *The Revenant*. But just as O'Higgins's story defies nationalist tropes, so the film defies cinematic tradition, citing *Barry Lyndon* (whose protagonist would have been O'Higgins's contemporary) in order to contrast its own quizzical approach to historical authenticity with Kubrick's legendary search for an 'authentic' tree for the opening scene of that film. Only a few shots of O'Higgins moving through the mountains and the film's closing sequence belong to the projected biopic, which now stars Aidan Gillen in place of the Chilean actor José Miguel Jimínez. These dramatised scenes are framed by quicksilver narration delivered by two voiceover actors, Denise Gough and Alan Howley, recording separately in a basic studio and occasionally addressing the filmmakers off-camera, a set-up reminiscent of *Krapp's Last Tape*.

Irish culture and its diasporan dissemination, along with the nitty-gritty of funding and prepping a multinational biopic, are signal elements of what seem like the voiceover's discursive meanders. As the detail builds and the strands entwine, it becomes clear that the film is a masterpiece of intricate if indirect construction. The viewer's first encounter with an older woman called Helen (notably the title of Molloy and Lawlor's first feature) is a case in point: she is filmed shooting a gun at the camera, part of a project around J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, whose narrative she summarises. Later, her memories of late-50s New York are interwoven with scenes from *On the Waterfront*, whose protagonists, the voiceover notes, both have Irish names (Malloy and Doyle).

Out of Ireland: Aidan Gillen

Helen is the mother of Joe Lawlor, and her story is interwoven with O'Higgins's. Like O'Higgins, she crossed the Atlantic: she was born in the Bronx but was sent back to County Kerry as a baby, before returning to New York in her twenties. Helen's story is the ordinary extraordinary one of late-19th/early-20th-century mass migration; she may not have a parallel to the Instituto O'Higgins that exists in Santiago, but her narrative both illuminates and is illuminated by her countryman's.

Like *Helen* (2008), which centred on the re-enactment of a schoolgirl's disappearance, *Further Beyond* is concerned with filling absences. The voiceover quotes Roland Barthes's famous assertion that to look at a photograph is to see the dead, but argues that the footage of Helen Lawlor, now deceased, and the filmic investigation of her youth, is revivifying for Joe Lawlor. The loss of a mother is subtly paralleled with the loss of land through colonial dispossession, but the film focuses on what lies beyond grief: the resilience of memory and of the migrant. Strategies such as voiceover narration, filming contemporary New York, interviewing Joe's uncle and revisiting the family farm all bring Helen to life in a way the conventional biopic cannot; these are bold reinventions rather than quests for authenticity, like O'Higgins's stealthy adoption of his landlord's status of baron.

Parallels, doubling and returns abound, as in the essay films of Patricio Guzmán, who similarly compounds individual and international histories around small but material coincidences. If Guzmán is considered the *ne plus ultra* of essay filmmaking, as *Barry Lyndon* is of the historical literary drama, then Molloy and Lawlor have found a route further beyond both, as crafty and hybrid as O'Higgins's self-reinvention. Constantly questioning fixed ideas of authenticity, the Desperate Optimists are very much the real thing. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Christine Molloy
Joe Lawlor
Written by
Christine Molloy
Joe Lawlor
Cinematographer
Joe Lawlor
Editors
Christine Molloy
Joe Lawlor
Composer
Stephen McKeon
Supervising Sound Editors
Jake Roberts
Barnaby Templer

©Desperate Optimists Productions
Production Companies
A Reel Art film funded by the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon
A Desperate Optimists production
Film Extracts
Le fatiche di Ercole/ Hercules (1958)

With
Denise Gough
voice-over artist 1
Alan Howley
voice-over artist 2
Tom Howley
the son
José Miguel Jiménez
Ambrose O'Higgins
Aidan Gillen
Ambrose O'Higgins

In Colour
[1.78:1] & [2.35:1]

Distributor
Desperate Optimists

In a studio, two actors read a script by filmmakers Christine Molloy and Joe Lawlor, which interweaves numerous threads. The central thread is an imagined biopic of the 18th-century figure Ambrose O'Higgins, who emigrated to Chile and renamed himself Ambrosio, Baron of Ballynary. This element is mixed in with other strands: the filmmakers' research into O'Higgins's early life in Ireland and Spain, before he became a folk hero in Chile; discussions about casting, location finding and funding; and a second biographical narrative strand, that of Lawlor's mother Helen, who like O'Higgins crossed the Atlantic. The voiceover narration is interrupted by the actors addressing Lawlor and Molloy off-camera. Images of Irish loughs and fields, of Cádiz in Spain and of Valparaíso and the Cordillera in Chile are presented, and the relation between the caption descriptions and the locations themselves questioned. Finally, the beginning of the planned biopic 'The Baron of Ballynary' is shown.

A Good American

Austria/Italy 2015
Director: Friedrich Moser
Certificate 15 101m 10s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

In the saga of data analyst Bill Binney, Austrian filmmaker Friedrich Moser has uncovered a story emblematic of the best and worst of America. Binney himself, a calm and reassuring presence, is the key witness in this feature doc, which shows how a maths geek with a can-do attitude proved himself an indefatigable military codebreaker and was later seconded to the National Security Agency, where the film's key events unfold. By the 1990s the world was going digital, but the NSA's intel-gathering was still analogue and based on keyword recognition, leaving the agency's analysts swamped by the weight of intercepted material. Binney's then groundbreaking concept was that you didn't actually need to trawl through the data content, that it would be more productive to look at the metadata instead, since the real worth was in investigating patterns of communications. Who was talking to whom? How often? What were the command and control structures? Binney had worked out that as the brave new world of web and mobile telephone networks presented a huge challenge to the intelligence community, the way to remain on top of it was to map the connections.

Moser provides us with an effective underlay of spy-movie atmospherics, with lots of aerial shots of Washington DC and close-ups of blinking vintage computer equipment. Yet what emerges is an absorbing film of ideas exploring our understanding of the changing bases of global communication as the digital revolution transformed our world. There's a beautiful animated sequence, for instance, tracing lines of individual connection until all we see is a tight, criss-crossing weave forming the shape of a globe. But could anyone build a system capable of mapping literally billions of connections? Binney and a small group of like-minded collaborators relished this impossible task and were getting outstanding results from test runs of the system they dubbed ThinThread when the NSA shut them down – three weeks before 9/11.

While Moser legitimately uses still-shocking footage of the World Trade Center attacks and other terror-related events to highlight the stakes for the security services, his film is undoubtedly a partisan affair. The murky story uncovers how NSA top brass chose to outsource a much-needed computer-systems upgrade to a private company run by their former colleagues, essentially making financial decisions instead of prioritising security imperatives. It plays out as a shocking misjudgement from those charged with protecting their nation. Names are named here, but none of those in positions of authority chose to speak to the filmmaker. Is there another side to the story, or are they still ashamed? In the circumstances, Binney and his colleagues resigned – only to learn that when analysts subsequently used ThinThread to sift through the data the NSA had already collected before the 2001 WTC attack, it picked out the whole terrorist network, and established that 9/11 could indeed have been prevented.

Somehow, though, given that the NSA's iniquities don't stop even there, the film rather muffles the impact of its major revelation, lacking a telling summation to send audiences out on a wave of outrage. Formally, Moser's offering is clearly not without issues, but as a piece of reportage it lays out in compelling fashion the makings of an American tragedy. One that cuts so deep, perhaps, that maybe only drama can do it full justice. Paging Michael Mann...

Behind enemy signs: Bill Binney

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Friedrich Moser
Written by/Author
Friedrich Moser
Dramaturgy
Michael Seeber
Cinematography
Friedrich Moser
Editing
Jesper Osmund
Kirk von Heflin
Production Design
Jana Maya Druskovic
Music
Christopher Slaski
Guy Farley
Location Sound
Atanas Tcholakov
Herbert Verdino
Alexander Wijnants
Andreas Prescher
Costume Design
Veronika
Susanna Harb

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Production Companies
Slingshot Films presents a Blue+Green Communication film with the financial support of Austrian Film Institute, Film Location Austria with the support of ORF - Austrian Broadcasting Corporation Film/ Television Agreement
A Friedrich Moser film
A Blue+Green Communication production
With the support of Austrian Film Institute, ORF - Austrian Broadcasting Corporation Film/ Television Agreement, Film Location Austria

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Picturehouse Entertainment

A documentary following the career of Bill Binney, a former technical director at the US National Security Agency whose specific approach to data analysis – examining patterns of communications rather than trawling through their content – was first honed during military service in the Vietnam era. By the 1990s, the NSA was struggling to cope with the digital revolution. With a small group of like-minded colleagues, Binney developed a new computer system codenamed ThinThread, capable of monitoring patterns of contact all over the world, yet also including crucial filters to protect the identity of innocent citizens. A change of leadership at the NSA saw the agency outsource the renewal of outdated analogue systems to a private company; three weeks before the 9/11 attacks, the ThinThread programme was terminated. Binney resigned when his software was adapted to begin blanket surveillance of all US citizens.

Later, when security officials used the ThinThread system to sift through the NSA's mass of pre-9/11 data, it revealed the communications footprint of the terrorists, showing that the attack could have been prevented. A follow-up Department of Defense report on these failings was 98 per cent redacted by the NSA.

I, Daniel Blake

United Kingdom/France/Belgium 2016
Director: Ken Loach
Certificate 15 100m 19s

See Feature on page 34

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

Ken Loach has always put his knack for comedy to work even in his most polemical films. From skewering the pomposity of authority figures, to expressing the natural exuberance of people who weren't always worn down by struggle, to conjuring French footballers in council estates, Loach shows the value of disarming an audience with laughter. With *I, Daniel Blake*, his latest film and one of his finest, Loach's talent for humour runs through the entire work. Here austerity politics is rendered both absurd and abusive in what the title character calls a "monumental farce", which might be funny if it weren't true.

In the opening scene, Daniel Blake (comedian Dave Johns), a joiner from Newcastle who is recovering from a major heart attack, has his patience tested by a woman who calls herself a 'healthcare professional' and asks him a barrage of questions about his arms, his fingers, his bowels, anything but his real trouble. Daniel's growing irritation at the ridiculous questions, ones he has already answered on paper, rapidly becomes hilarious. But this test, the 'fit for work' assessment that will decide independently of his doctors' advice whether he can receive the necessary benefits, is deadly serious. And this sick, lonely, unemployed widower's question, "Why won't you ask me about my heart?" is unbearably poignant. Within the structure of a comic skit, Paul Laverty's razor-sharp screenplay encapsulates Daniel's tragedy.

Following this tick-box assessment, Daniel is denied Employment and Support Allowance and, pending an appeal, his only option for an income is Jobseeker's Allowance, which comes with conditions. He must spend his days looking for jobs – rare enough in the first place – that he cannot take. Daniel, at the end of his tether, sees that he is not the only victim of this joke. At the job centre where he is made aware of his situation, he meets a single mother from London, Katie (Hayley Squires), transplanted to Newcastle because of a lack of social housing in the capital. This solution to one city's housing crisis leaves her stranded without her support network of family and friends. Having taken the wrong bus to the job centre, she has arrived late for her appointment and is denied her week's benefits. For Katie, after uprooting her family, this is a punishment on top of a punishment. The silver lining is that Daniel and Katie become friends: he looks after her children and helps to fix up her flat, where she lives in Dickensian poverty, starving by candlelight. Katie supports him as he navigates the indignities of the welfare system.

In one of the film's most moving scenes, she and her children talk to Daniel about his wife. Yes, someone is finally asking him about his heart, but also simply listening to a man rendered voiceless by bureaucracy. While the DWP is 'digital by default' and all forms must be completed online, joiner Daniel is 'pencil by default'. Hence the humiliating interrogation that opens the film, and later a threat of benefit sanctions because handwritten journals and CVs are not acceptable evidence of job-

Jobseekers' disallowance: Dave Johns, Hayley Squires

hunting. Daniel, who struggles to use the necessary computers and smartphones, let alone afford them, persists with his pencil until only spray-paint will do, and his unacceptable script is writ large on the job centre wall.

Laverty, Loach's long-term collaborator, has crafted a script of intricate, hellish detail, describing a system that penalises vulnerability. Robbie Ryan's austerity palette of beiges, greys and blues also evokes a life stripped to less than the essentials. Under Loach's subtle direction, Johns's talent for joke-telling becomes a bewildered voice of reason and then a rallying cry. Squires is more than a foil to his lead, carrying some of the film's weightiest, most heartbreaking scenes, including a sequence in a food bank that rivals the end of *Cathy Come Home* (1966) in Loach's portfolio of state-induced emotional devastation. The only alternative to following the twisted rules is illegality, which brings greater rewards and a more distant threat of punitive action. Though Katie and Daniel's neighbour (a warehouseman on a zero-hours contract) both take that road, Daniel himself cannot. Perhaps the only scene in this compelling film that doesn't perfectly succeed is when Daniel chivalrously attempts to carry Katie away from the trap she has knowingly entered.

This, the film that brought Loach out of his 'retirement', is a return to the form of his best work, and a desperately important exposé of an unfair system. It resists commentary as much as it does cliché, fading to black intermittently to allow reflection instead. *I, Daniel Blake*, like its hero, demands to be seen.

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Rebecca O'Brien
Screenplay
Paul Laverty
Photography
Robbie Ryan
Editor
Jonathan Morris
Production Designers
Fergus Clegg
Linda Wilson
Music
George Fenton

Recordist
Ray Beckett
Costume Designer
Joanne Slater

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Production Companies
Sixteen Films, Why Not Productions, Wild Bunch, BFI, BBC Films, Les Films du Fleuve, France 2 Cinéma, Canal+, France Télévisions, Le Pacte, Cinéart, Ciné+, VOO and Be tv
Produced with the support of Tax Shelter of the Belgian Federal Government, Casa Kafka Pictures, Belfius
Co-funded by the European Union – Creative Europe MEDIA
Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund
Executive Producers
Pascal Caucheteux
Grégoire Sorlat
Vincent Maraval

Cast
Dave Johns
Daniel Blake, 'Dan'
Hayley Squires
Katie
Briana Shann
Daisy
Dylan Phillip McKiernan
Dylan
Kate Rutter
Ann
Sharon Percy
Sheila
Kema Sikazwe
China
Steven Richens
Piper

In Colour [1.85:1]

Distributor
E1 Films

Newcastle, the present. Daniel, a widower, has had a heart attack and is signed off work by his doctors. To receive benefits, he must complete a 'fit for work' test, which he fails. He is told he must go on Jobseeker's Allowance, which requires him to look for work. He meets Katie, a single mother from London, at the jobcentre. He accompanies her home and promises to help fix up her flat. He discovers that his neighbour is making money by selling fake designer trainers. Daniel has been struggling to fill in his online JSA form, so his neighbour helps him and prints out a form to request an appeal for his benefits decision. Daniel accompanies Katie to a food bank with her children. When Katie shoplifts sanitary products from a supermarket, the manager lets her off, while the security guard offers her escorting work. Daniel's benefits adviser is not satisfied that he is looking for work, and his allowance is stopped. Daniel sells his furniture to pay a bill. Katie takes up sex work; when Daniel confronts her at the brothel, she explains that this is her only option. After an unsatisfactory meeting at the jobcentre, Daniel spray-paints his demand for an appeal-hearing date on the building. He is arrested and cautioned. His health deteriorates and he dies on the day of his hearing. Katie reads out his speech for the appeal hearing at his funeral, in which he accuses the system of driving him into an early grave.

In Pursuit of Silence

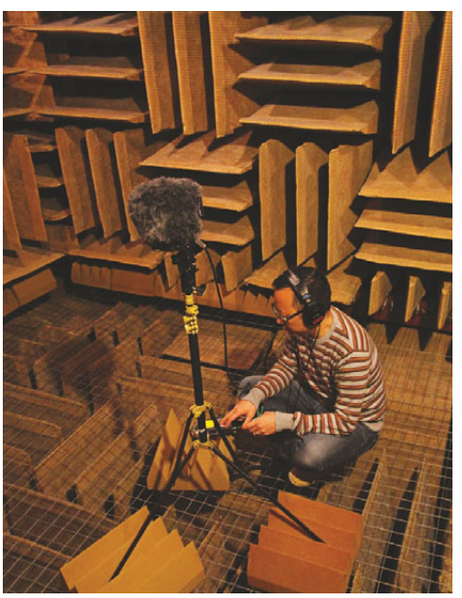
United Kingdom 2016
Director: Patrick Shen

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

In the great central atrium of the Lloyd's Building in London, besuited staff and brokers throng the multi-tiered floor space, all in silence. The keen-eyed, though, spot the red-poppy buttonholes dotted throughout, and after bowing heads on this Remembrance Day commemoration, the masses soon shift back to work and cacophony. The sequence comes early on in Patrick Shen's documentary exploration of the role of silence in our lives, and provides a striking glimpse of the contrast between the noise that surrounds us every day and those increasingly rare moments of quiet reflection that carry connotations of inward self-knowledge or spiritual communion. While the film opens with a montage of remote windswept landscapes, it soon becomes clear that Shen's objective is not just to share some chill-out moments with us, but also to open up various avenues of discussion around the theme of silence. In turn, this leads to a somewhat ironic situation where writers and thinkers expound on the restorative potency of silence – which their words are holding at bay.

Admittedly, Shen brings in some worthwhile participants, including authors George Prochnik (*In Pursuit of Silence*) and Pico Iyer (*The Art of Stillness*), and moves quickly between aphoristic pronouncements – "Silence is where we speak something deeper than our words" – all the while covering a whole host of bases, including the evolutionary threat to our long-distance hearing if we as a species spend too much time surrounded by a haze of noise. Christian and Buddhist monks attest to the values of silence in contemplation of deity and self, but the film also touches on the worth of silence as we begin to put statistics on the harmful effects of noise pollution. It's not only a matter of rising stress levels: noise can even result in increased activity among cancer cells. In Japan, this has led to an official scheme whereby certain remote spots are flagged up for their therapeutic benefit.

In total, this adds up to a useful survey, even if the presence of Japanese temples, tea ceremonies and the aural challenge of



Noises off: *In Pursuit of Silence*

★★★★ "A bittersweet comedy and shrewd social commentary"
India Halstead, Culture Whisper

Best Actress Silver Bear 66 Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin

The Commune

A film by Thomas Vinterberg

OFFICIAL SELECTION Edinburgh International Film Festival 2016

"Thomas Vinterberg's best since Festen"
Geoff Andrew, Sight & Sound

★★★★
The Upcoming

"Touching and funny"
David Sexton, Evening Standard

"Thoroughly engaging"
Oliver Johnston, The Upcoming

"An emotional and intensely focused lead performance"
Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian

★★★★
The Hollywood News

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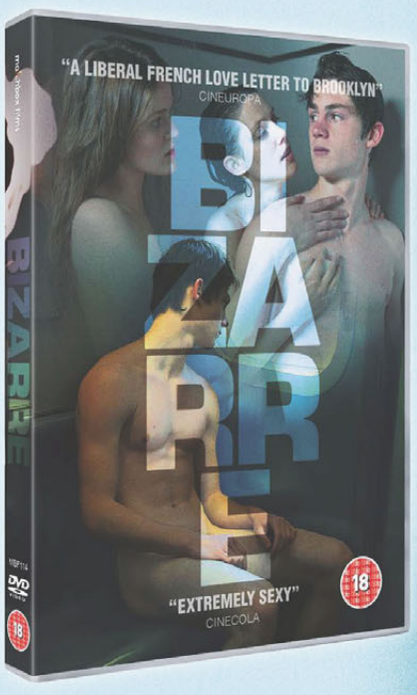

65 Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin
Panorama

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CINEUROPA

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Tokyo's familiar Shibuya interchange are perhaps a tad predictable. Still, director-editor Shen (who also shared camera duties with Brandon Vedder) definitely has an eye for the still framing of single images – whether the expanses of Alaska or rainy-day commuter misery in London – and his visual device of captioning the background noise levels at sundry locations (running the gamut from a -13dB anechoic chamber to a New York public school where the passing trains hit 98dB) adeptly ties together the film's multifarious subject areas.

And yet it's somehow not a transportive viewing experience like, say, Philip Gröning's monastic portrait *Into Great Silence* (2005) or the more contemplative moments in Godfrey Reggio and Ron Fricke's filmography. Shen offers us several encounters with Greg Hindy, an intrepid soul who needed some headsapce in his life and decided to walk across America from coast to coast, sustaining a vow of silence along the way. Hindy communicates with a pen and notepad, but the movie as a whole never manages the same sense of conviction. Every time it gets too quiet, the spell is broken by another blast of voiceover or some more rippling piano from Alex Lu's workmanlike score. And what's the point of highlighting John Cage's once-notorious silent score *4'33"*, if you're not going to allow the viewers to experience its enveloping effect in full. The content here is assembled with a good deal of thought, yet aesthetically the film comes over as a failure of nerve. The title is certainly appropriate, but not perhaps in the way its maker intended.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Andrew Brumme
Patrick Shen
Brandon Vedder
Partly Inspired by
the book *In Pursuit of Silence: Listening for Meaning in a World of Noise* by George Prochnik
Cinematographers
Patrick Shen
Brandon Vedder
Editor
Patrick Shen
Composer/Musical Score Composed/ Conducted/ Produced by/Piano
Alex Lu
Supervising Sound Editor/ Sound Designer
Steve Bissinger

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Production Companies
Dartmouth Films presents a Transcendental Media production
UK Release supported by John Lewis in association with Quiet Mark
Executive Producers
Andrew Brumme
Poppy Szkiler
Lawrence S. Finegold

5.1 Surround
In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Dartmouth Films

A documentary examining the role of silence in busy, technologically driven modern lives increasingly subject to noise pollution. Global locations, from remote landscapes to city centres, are shown, and their noise levels measured in decibels. Meanwhile various philosophers, theologians and Buddhist monks offer their thoughts on humanity's need for silence and its spiritual significance. Statistics show the impact of noise pollution on our physiological and psychological wellbeing, something that is recognised in Japan, where there are now official healing locations in remote landscapes across the country. This is, the film suggests, perhaps one sign of slowly shifting attitudes to noise and silence, another being the change in status of John Cage's silent composition '4'33"', which was greeted with outrage at its 1952 premiere but is today recognised as a key 20th-century work.

The Land of the Enlightened

Belgium/Germany/Ireland/The Netherlands/Afghanistan/France 2015
Director: Pieter-Jan De Pue
Certificate 15 87m 57s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

At the start of Pieter-Jan De Pue's drama-documentary mash-up, a voiceover (spoken by Sohrab Nazari) relates how Afghanistan was originally "God's garden", gifted to the legendary King Nasrullah. When Nasrullah angered Genghis Khan, the country suffered the first of a long series of invasions, "army after army". And "for as long as foreigners are present in his land," we're told, "the soul of the holy warrior can know no peace."

Gholam Nasir, the young horseman whose exploits at the head of his band of 'Lions' we follow, evidently sees himself as this 'holy warrior'. (Not that he and his cohorts appear to be particularly devout: at one point they're berated by an imam for continuing their scavenging activities during the hour of prayer.) Along with selling leftovers of munitions, such as bullet- and shell-casings, for scrap, they harvest opium from the poppy fields and trade explosives for lapis lazuli from the local mines – that is, when they're not plundering passing caravans at gunpoint. De Pue's view of these teenage bandits is largely benevolent: Gholam is romanticised by being granted a voiceover in which he tells of his devotion to a young girl, Marbet, whom he plans to make his princess and install in a palace when he and his followers conquer Kabul.

Meanwhile the detachment of US troops manning a nearby observation post above the Kunar Valley comes in for rather more satirical treatment. Clearly bored out of their skulls, the grunts pass their time noodling on guitars, flossing their teeth or shaving each other's heads, while now and then loosing off a shell or two at anything that moves. An African-American officer, painfully sincere, tells a roomful of unimpressed local tribesmen, "You're all my brothers." But his message has been pre-empted and undercut by footage of American soldiers tearing apart a family's hut and brutally manhandling its inhabitants, while one of their comrades likens the Afghan troops – supposedly their allies – to "cockroaches looking for crumbs".

Reminders of previous invaders are omnipresent: Gholam's gang make their HQ in a former Soviet outpost, and we see them busily dismantling a huge graveyard of Soviet tanks. The soundtrack offers a melancholic Russian ballad with the refrain "Afghanistan... Afghanistan!" ("No one knew why we became sad again," the singer laments.) The song chimes with the director's taste for lyrical visual effects: more than once his camera follows a hawk's swooping flight above the valley, and there are several (indeed, rather too many) time-lapse sequences of scudding clouds and evocative long-shots of tiny mounted figures strung out against epic mountain panoramas.

The mix of documentary footage and obviously staged sequences, of romance and reality, makes for a pervasive uncertainty of tone, not helped by passages of self-consciously poetic dialogue. "It's quiet now," says one youngster gently to a mine he's just defused, "we'll go home together." De Pue's film, shot on Super 16mm over some seven years, undeniably looks gorgeous (it won a cinematography award at Sundance), but its striving after dreamlike, even mythological elements often winds up feeling sentimental. Still, as a bid to offer a fresh perspective on a country whose fierce social and political complexities bewilder most outsiders, it deserves credit for an original approach.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Bart Van Langendonck
Script
Pieter-Jan De Pue
David Dusa
Voice Over Text
Herwig Deweerdt
Pieter-Jan De Pue
Director of Photography
Pieter-Jan De Pue
Editors
David Dusa
Stijn Deconinck
Composer
Denis Clohessy
Supervising Sound Editor/ Sound Design
Robert Flanagan

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Production Companies
Savage Film presents in co-production with Submarine, Fastnet Films, Gebrueder Beetz Filmproduktion, ZDF, Ikon, Canvas and Afghan Film in association with Eyeworks, Arte and Telenet with the support of The Flanders Audiovisual Fund (Vaf), The Netherlands Film Fund, Centre du Cinéma et de L'audiovisuel de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles et de Voo, Bord Scannán na Héireann—The Irish Film Board Belgian Development Cooperation—DGD, Media Programme of the European Union, The Belgian Tax Shelter for Film Financing
A film by Pieter-Jan De Pue
A Savage Film production
in co-production with Gebrueder Beetz Filmproduktion, Fastnet Films, Submarine, ZDF/ Arte, Canvas, Ikon, Afghan Film
in association with Eyeworks, Telenet/ Prime, Sciapode
with the support of The Flanders Audiovisual Fund (Vaf), The Netherlands Film Fund, Le Centre du Cinéma et de L'audiovisuel de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles et de Voo, Bord Scannán na Héireann—The Irish Film Board, Belgian Development Cooperation—DGD, Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, Belgian Development Cooperation—DGD, Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, Media Programme of the E.U. in collaboration with Flanders Image

With
Gholam Nasir
Khyrgyz Baj
Askar Khan
Band Ali
Ali Barsh
Mohammed Isa
Fais Mohammed
Deh Khan
Noor Khan

Zulfu

voice over
Sohrab Nazari

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

The Pamir Mountains, north-west Afghanistan, the present. Gholam Nasir, a young teenager, leads a band of youthful horsemen who call themselves 'the Lions'. They have their headquarters in a former Soviet outpost and, when not robbing passing caravans, subsist by gathering opium from poppies, scavenging spent munitions and swapping stolen explosives for lapis lazuli from the local mines, all of which they sell. Gholam is infatuated with Marbet, the child daughter of a local village leader, whom he supplies with opium in the hope of gaining Marbet's hand. President Obama's announcement that the last US troops will soon quit Afghanistan prompts Gholam to dream of one day conquering Kabul with his Lions, becoming leader of the country and installing Marbet in the palace as his princess.

Nearby, overlooking the Kunar Valley, is a joint Afghan/American observation post, where the American troops are stultifyingly bored. A group of them violently ransack a villager's hut and find opium. An African-American officer tries to persuade local tribal leaders that the Taliban are near defeat and that the country will be safe and fully pacified when the US troops hand over to the Afghan National Army. Having predicted the imminent triumph of Afghanistan over foreign invaders, Gholam leads his followers to a ruined palace, which he proposes to restore to its former glory.

The Light Between Oceans

USA/United Kingdom/India 2016
Director: Derek Cianfrance
Certificate 12A 132m 30s

Reviewed by Roger Clarke

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Metaphor is a tricky thing in the movies. Here, it's the metaphor of a remote Australian lighthouse. These salutary buildings are the most thematically unexplored of all gothic locations. Furthermore, lighthouses have an old connection with English-language storytelling. The author Robert Louis Stevenson enjoyed a childhood literally fed and watered by the proceeds of building lighthouses: the 'Lighthouse' Stevensons perfected their modern design along the coast of Scotland and then sent their blueprints around the world. There's something profoundly authorial about the lighthouse.

It's also everywhere in the movies, from the logo for Castle Rock productions to a romantic scene in kids' ghost film *Casper* (1995). Lighthouses stalk versions of *Jaws* and provide the eerie light of the ghost pirates' return in John Carpenter's *The Fog* (1980). See a lighthouse and you can expect trouble, dark trouble.

This movie is based on M.L. Stedman's bestselling 2012 novel, and it tells the story of a shell-shocked WWI veteran who goes to work on a lighthouse in Western Australia, where he hopes to opt out of the human race. But he unexpectedly falls in love with a young woman who lost her brother in the same war. Initially their life together is an idyll, but desperation arrives after she miscarries; when they find a baby washed up in a boat, they decide to pretend it's theirs.

The film recalls Anthony Minghella's oeuvre, but without that director's detailed, companionable understanding of human folly. Stedman's story has generally been rendered faithfully by US writer-director Derek Cianfrance, who has made a name for himself with the deeply actor-friendly *Blue Valentine* (2010) and *The Place Beyond the Pines* (2012), both starring Ryan Gosling. Here, Cianfrance has gone thematically colossal, and to help him deal with all those big rocks and big seas he has tapped the talents of an almighty thespian trio, a dream team of contemporary actors, giving the Gosling role to Michael Fassbender and finding

Michael Fassbender, Alicia Vikander

parts for Alicia Vikander and Rachel Weisz to complete the triangle. They all act a great deal, as the pathetic fallacy crashes on the rocks around them. Nothing is too tragic for the sea.

Cianfrance has been courageous. He has decided to take on a story in which no one comes out of it very well, a subtlety frankly more suited to novels than to cinema. There's also a fitful feeling that he's pitched a losing battle with an intractable metaphorical landscape. There's some beautiful photography. Everything thrums with implicit meaningfulness. You can almost smell the sweet sea wind coming off the sweet sea grasses. Everything is quite tasteful – the music, the interiors – and though storms high on the Bergman-scale may rage outside, the designers make sure that the candle flames burn straight within. Montages prop up the weak spots, like wire in an armature.

The film ends many years later, when Fassbender, now living alone and widowed somewhere in the Australian outback, receives a visit from his grown-up 'daughter' with a grandchild for him in tow. In truth we're grateful for an ending as sweet as quandong, that sugary bush-tucker fruit, but even happier to be on dry land once more, and far away from metaphor.

But then again, for all we know, she's stolen the baby.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
David Heyman
Jeffrey Clifford
Written for the Screen by
Derek Cianfrance
Based on the novel by M.L. Stedman
Director of Photography
Adam Arkapaw
Edited by
Ron Patane
Jim Helton

Production Designer
Karen Murphy
Music Composed and Conducted by
Alexandre Desplat
Production Sound Mixer
Richard Flynn
Costume Designer
Erin Benach

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Production Companies
DreamWorks Pictures and Reliance Entertainment present in association with Participant Media a Heyday Films production
A film by Derek Cianfrance
Executive Producers
Tom Karnowski
Rosie Alison
Jeff Skoll
Jonathan King

Cast
Michael Fassbender Tom Sherbourne
Alicia Vikander Isabel Graysmark
Rachel Weisz Hannah Roennfeldt
Bryan Brown Septimus Potts
Jack Thompson Ralph Addicott
Garry McDonald Bill Graysmark
Jane Menelaus Violet Graysmark
Anthony Hayes Sergeant Vernon Knuckey
Leon Ford Frank Roennfeldt
Florence Clery Lucy-Grace
Thomas Unger Bluey Smart
Gerald Bryan Captain Percy Hasluck

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
E1 Films

Western Australia, 1920. Shell-shocked WWI veteran Tom Sherbourne arrives in a small town with the intention of becoming a lighthouse-keeper, wishing to live alone and isolated. However, he falls in love with Isabel, and they marry. They are happy together but she miscarries, and subsequently loses a second child. This tragedy coincides with a boat being washed up on the island; in it are the body of a dead man and a surviving baby, protected in the prow. Tom decides to cover the incident up, and buries the dead man. Tom and Isabel keep the child, calling her Grace and pretending that she is their own. They live happily together as a family, but eventually their secret is revealed and Grace is returned to her birth mother Hannah. Tom is suspected of murdering the man in the boat and is sent to jail.

Thirty years later, Grace (now called Lucy-Grace) visits the widowed Tom, her baby in her arms.

Light Years

United Kingdom/Germany 2015
Director: Esther May Campbell
Certificate 12A 89m 13s

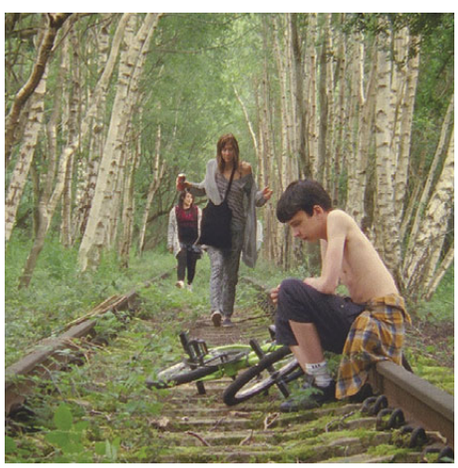
Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

Like *My Neighbour Totoro* adapted to live action by Terrence Malick, *Light Years* tells the story of a gently fractured family – of three children adrift as their mother moves into a care home, and how the pressure of her illness brings them and their father into a more alert and tender awareness of the world around them, and the fragile bonds between them. Esther May Campbell's first feature builds on the promise of her Bafta-winning short *September* (2008) and its observation of the tangled world of the edgelands. Produced by Samm Haillay, who also produced Duane Hopkins's *Better Things* (2008) and *Bypass* (2014), *Light Years* similarly enters spaces neither urban nor rural, where industrial estates reveal vibrant greenery and wooded uplands overlook dual carriageways.

Campbell, whose previous directing work includes teen television series *Skins*, shows great confidence in handing the majority of the film's scenes, and its point of view, to her young (mostly first-time) performers. Zamira Fuller stands out as Rose, who drives the action by taking off to find her mother Moira's care home after her father Dee promises to take her there and then reneges. Each child follows their own narrative: Rose, the youngest, has to find the mother she barely remembers prior to the onset of her illness; Ewan, the middle child, searches for signs that he has inherited Moira's genetic condition, and has to confront his fear of impending doom to look for Rose; and Ramona, the oldest, waits for a love story as romantic as that of her parents', who met when Moira was travelling in Dee's homeland. Having found the boy of her dreams by chance, she has to walk away from him when she remembers that her sister is missing.

Moira and Dee are less mobile, trapped in their mourning for each other. Alone in the care home, Moira mimics bird cries; Dee immerses himself in his work at an industrial greenhouse, surrounded by pollinating butterflies. Each of them has near-wordless scenes with carers and co-workers that build their separate identities, the sense that each is only half-there without the other, before they are reunited at the end – brought together obliquely by their children's determination.

In their meeting, Campbell's film also subtly creates rapprochement between the localist 'new British weird' and transnational



Sophie Burton, Beth Orton, James Stuckey

Slow Cinema, by casting Turkish actor Muhammet Uzuner (*Once upon a Time in Anatolia*) in his first English-language role as agricultural worker Dee, opposite singer Beth Orton as Moira. Orton's performance is summed up in the scene where a care worker removes Moira's flesh-toned medication patch to reveal the bare skin beneath: she peels off the layer of social behaviour associated with mothering and adult femininity, immersing herself and the viewer in a fresh and frightening understanding of the world.

When Moira plunges into the sea towards the end of the film, and Rob McGregor's underwater cinematography takes over, resonances with Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993) surface, present also in the opening images of flashes of light against darkness. Repeated throughout the film, this enigmatic panned shot changes from sunlight between tree trunks to headlights strafing a golf course, and finally to stars in the sky when Moira explains the Big Bang to her youngest daughter. This cosmological flight is what induces the comparison to Malick, though Campbell's film is resolutely secular, or possibly animist. As in the cinema of Lynne Ramsay, Andrea Arnold and Clio Barnard, horses, rats, wind and trees have as dynamic a presence as humans – framing Moira's illness and its effects within a sense of a cosmos that is still expanding.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Samm Haillay
Wendy Bevan-Mogg
Duane Hopkins
Andrew McVicar
Written by
Esther May Campbell
Cinematography
Zac Nicholson
Will Pugh
Cinematographer
Underwater Unit:
Rob McGregor
Editor
Chris Barwell
Production Designer
Jane Morton
Music
Eric Chenaux
Sound Supervisor
Chiz Williams
Costume Designer
Maggie Chappelhow

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Production Companies
BFI & Creative England present a Third Films production in association with Finite Films, Filmsat59, Wounded Buffalo, The Match Factory & Illuminations Films
Made with the support of Creative England, BFI's Film Fund
Executive Producers
Keith Griffiths
Amy Gardner
Christopher Collins
Chris Moll
Richard Holmes

Cast
Sophie Burton
Ramona
Zamira Fuller
Rose
James Stuckey
Ewan
Beth Orton
Moira
Muhammet Uzuner
Dee
Mike Wright
Spirit
Graeme Hogg
Roderick
Mickey Morris
Levi
Ewan Cooke
Nathan
Fouad Cilmi
Abdi
Suzanne Pickering-McCulloch
Janice

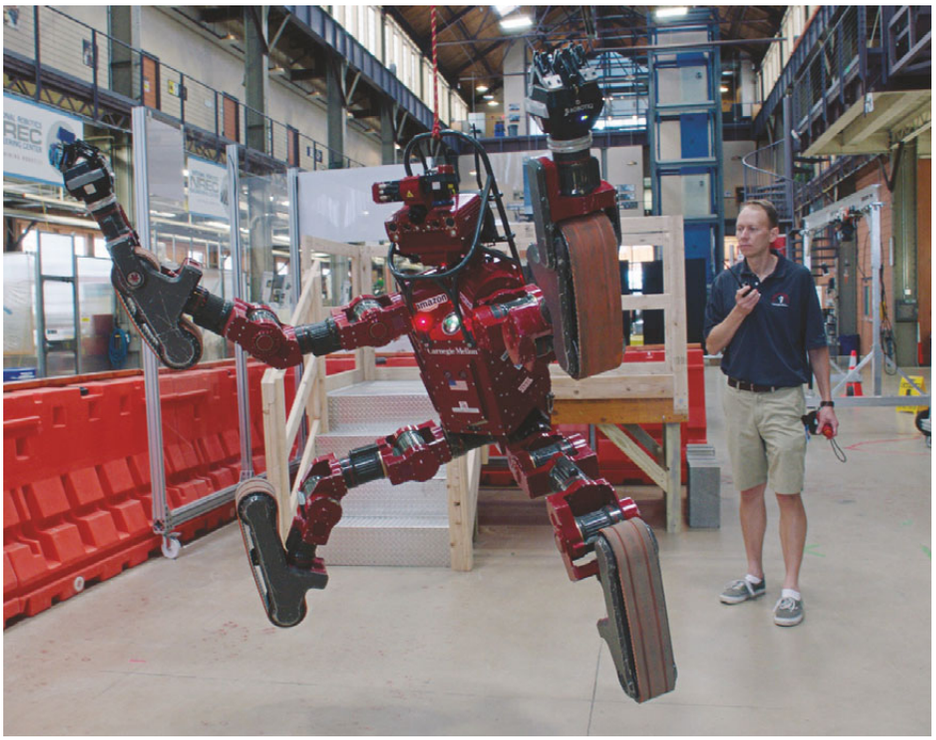
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Third Films

The west of England, the present. Rose is hoping to visit her mother Moira, who is ill and in a care home; when her father Dee goes to his work as an industrial gardener, she decides to make her own way there. Her older siblings Ewan and Ramona are wrapped up in their own concerns and fantasies: Ewan worries that he has inherited his mother's condition; Ramona dreams of love. After trying to alert Dee to Rose's disappearance, Ewan and Ramona follow the clues given to them by Levi, a local boy with a crush on Rose. Having reached the care home, Rose has taken Moira out to the seaside – but Moira has memory lapses, and leaves Rose alone in a field, where Ramona and Ewan find her. At the beach, all four swim in the sea. The children take a shivering Moira back to the care home, where Dee is waiting for her.

Lo and Behold Reveries of the Connected World

USA 2016
Director: Werner Herzog



Algorhythms: *Lo and Behold: Reveries of the Connected World*

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

"I don't want to live in a *world without lions*, and without people who are lions," Werner Herzog said in *Burden of Dreams*, Les Blank's 1982 portrait of the Bavarian director on the set of his film *Fitzcarraldo*. In *Lo and Behold: Reveries of the Connected World*, the alarmingly-prolific-of-late Herzog surveys the prospect of a world where – not to speak of lions – humanity itself has been augmented, surpassed or supplanted by technology. Herzog's scepticism towards this outcome, regardless of the fact that Nasdaq-traded tech company NetScout Systems Inc is picking up the tab on his movie, is something of a foregone conclusion.

Herzog's bit about the world without lions has stayed with me through the years since I first heard it as an undergraduate, as has a great deal about the movies he made leading up to *Fitzcarraldo* – there is something of Herzog's Hemingway-esque conviction that a creative and a heroic life could be one and the same thing which I suspect has a particular appeal to young men. But as one whose cinema is bonded to the physical world and its obstacles, Herzog would seem a singularly strange choice to explore the virtual realm, as he endeavours to do in *Lo and Behold*.

Herzog's film is never less than watchable by virtue of the line-up of personalities who've agreed to sit for him, though the fact that this one-time outsider artist is now a niche celebrity able to broker such a high level of access is one reason why the final result is so far from attaining the sense of awe and mystery – and back-door lock-jimmying risk-taking – of his best documentary work, from which we are now decades removed. Retrospectively, *Fitzcarraldo* and *Burden of Dreams*

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Rupert Maconick
Werner Herzog
Written by
Werner Herzog
Director of Photography
Peter Zeitlinger
Edited by
Marco Capalbo
Music Composed and Performed by
Mark Degli Antoni
with
Sebastian Steinberg
Sound Mixer
Jim Lakin

©Saville Productions

Production Companies
Netscout presents a film by Werner Herzog
Saville Productions
in association with
Netscout, Pereira & O'Dell Entertainment, Skellig Rock
Executive Producers
Jim McNiel
Dave Arnold
Tennille Teague
David Moore

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Dogwoof

In ten themed and titled chapters, this documentary by Werner Herzog tells the story of the internet from the early days of the Arpanet to the speculative future, using the testimony of scientists and experts in research institutions around the US, as well as archival footage and interviews with people affected by the technology. Dissident innovator Ted Nelson outlines an alternative vision of the World Wide Web. The family of Nikki Catsouras, a teenager who was killed in a car crash and whose death-scene images were disseminated online, discuss the trauma they've faced. In Green Bank, West Virginia, a 'quiet zone' where internet and cellphone signals are restricted has become a haven for people sensitive to wireless radiation, while in the north-west there is a refuge for those recovering from internet addiction. Astronomer Lucianne Walkowicz muses on the devastating effects that a natural phenomenon such as a solar flare could have on the internet; various security experts and ex-hacker Kevin Mitnick outline scenarios in which it would be possible for someone to create chaos in the virtual realm. Elon Musk, CEO of private space-exploration company SpaceX, and robotics engineers at Carnegie Mellon University outline the possible applications of the internet in the world of the future, though finally Herzog dwells on speakers discussing the potential of technology to diminish man.

seem like the end and beginning of something: the end of a remarkable surge of work that started with the breakthrough of *Signs of Life* (1968), and the beginning of Herzog's successful branding of his persona, which allowed for a 21st-century renascence accompanying the rerelease of his films on the then new DVD format at around the time that the protagonist-documentarian, à la Michael Moore, had gained new popularity. And so the author of the magisterial *Land of Silence and Darkness* (1971) was well on his way to becoming a folkloric figure of fun, a Paul F. Tompkins impersonation, a (great) *Jack Reacher* villain and a talking head who can be relied on to give good quote on Pokémon Go.

One of the most classically Herzogian moments in *Lo and Behold* comes right at the top, when the camera is ushered through a "repulsive" (per the director's voiceover) institutional corridor at Boelter Hall at the University of California, Los Angeles, then turns into Room 3420, housing the rudimentary trunk-like Interface Message Processor – the room is the incubator where the internet took its first fumbling steps, made up to appear as it did on that fateful day in 1969. Tour guide Leonard Kleinrock is a computer networking innovator, like passed-over visionary Ted Nelson, who appears shortly afterwards, and both men have something of the mania of true pioneers, which distinguishes them from the younger subjects, most of whom present a smooth, TED-talk-honed pitch to the camera. When in the field and away from controlled, formal settings, Herzog takes more liberties in underscoring the strangeness of the proceedings, but these gestures seem forced, coming in the form of oddball asides (a shot of Buddhist monks on the shores of Lake Michigan dickering with smartphones), pseudo-poetic cutaways, and disconcerting framings, as when the family of teenager Nikki Catsouras, whose mangled death images were disseminated online, are awkwardly posed in their kitchen in mourning black, looking something like a coven.

The Catsouras matriarch identifies the internet as the literal Antichrist, while Herzog endeavours, through a programmatic 'chaptered' structure, to give a portrait of the 'Connected World' in the round, broadly illustrating how it is only as bad – or as good – as the people programming and using it. Such a conclusion, as well as Herzog's mostly stolid, interview-based approach, is a rather hidebound way to address the revolution in consciousness sparked by the internet, more challengingly spoken to by the best product of two decades of 'net.art' practice from creators – entirely unacknowledged here – who speak in the lingua franca of the online world, or by a popular serial narrative such as *Silicon Valley*. In comparison, *Lo and Behold* feels dilettantish, a made-to-order product with just enough 'signature touches' to pass muster. Herzog ventured into the Amazon for *Fitzcarraldo*, but he hasn't gotten *inside* the internet as his topic demands here, only made a series of house calls.

At one point, late in the film, the director scoffs at a subject's question about whether artificial intelligence could one day make a better movie than he can, but *Lo and Behold* is awfully close to Herzog by the algorithm.

The Magnificent Seven

USA 2016
Director: Antoine Fuqua
Certificate 12A 132m 40s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The Magnificent Seven isn't particularly good as westerns go but it is a western, and that gives it a slight edge on other movies at least. I'm glad they're making oaters with some regularity again, even if the results – with the unusual exception of Pixar's *The Good Dinosaur* – seem more often to show the influence of the spaghetti western rather than the classical American model.

By my scorecard, music-video director turned genre journeyman Antoine Fuqua has never made a wholly satisfying movie, and *The Magnificent Seven* doesn't break the streak, though his ensemble cast, including former *Training Day* co-stars Denzel Washington and Ethan Hawke, seem to be relishing the opportunity to dude up in gunslinger garb and ride horses, none more so than Vincent D'Onofrio as a bearish, scripture-quoting mountain man who has tuned his line readings to a piping tone somewhere between Chill Wills and Andy Devine. Rounding out the marquee names is Chris Pratt as the group's resident flask-suckling toper and wiseacre, who handles most of the comic relief and gets to die with his boots on.

Fuqua's film is very much an inclusive (and export-friendly) western of 2016, and his Seven, representative of a motley, diverse West, are rounded out by a Comanche brave (Martin Sensmeier), a Chinese assassin with a penchant for edged weapons (Byung-Hun Lee) and an outlaw from south of the border (Manuel Garcia-Rulfo). This is a departure from previous iterations of the same story by John Sturges (1960) and Kurosawa Akira (1954), which respectively starred a passel of Caucasians (and a 'Mexican' played by Horst Buchholz) and a bunch of Japanese guys.

This, as well as the fact that Fuqua and his leading man are black, that Washington's character's backstory includes a lynching episode, and that the deciding shot of the film is fired by a woman (Haley Bennett's vengeance-driven widow), may render *The Magnificent Seven* of interest to those with an especial concern with issues of representation in popular movies – one factor in the campaigning to reconsider Gore Verbinski's *The Lone Ranger* (2013) as a legit *film maudit*. But Fuqua's *The Magnificent Seven* also exists as a movie, a piece of narrative workmanship, and from this perspective it is, to use the popular coinage, problematic.

Safety in numbers: Denzel Washington

Neither Fuqua nor his regular DP Mauro Fiore has, in their collaborations, demonstrated much instinct for getting the camera in quite the right place at the right time, and *The Magnificent Seven*'s outdoor photography seemed curiously diffuse and murky on the football-field-sized Imax screen I saw it on. (My sense is that this was not a decision à la *McCabe & Mrs Miller*.) The climactic shootout is an Antietam-sized blowout, and while comparing anyone else's large-scale action choreography to Kurosawa or Peckinpah is perhaps unfair, it's also – given the territory Fuqua is mucking about in – kind of irresistible. Let's say he's less good and leave it at that. The screenplay, from Richard Wenk and *True Detective*'s Nic Pizzolatto, tosses a few chewy morsels of cowpoke argot to the cast, and provides robber-baron heavy Peter Sarsgaard occasion to ham. It's not John Ford, or even *Young Guns II: Blaze of Glory* – which at least had youthful charisma and a Bon Jovi title track – but, like I said, it *is* a western, and that's something.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Roger Birnbaum
Todd Black
Screenplay
Nic Pizzolatto
Richard Wenk
Director of Photography
Mauro Fiore
Film Editor
John Refoua
Production Designer
Derek R. Hill
Music
James Horner
Simon Franglen
Production Sound Mixer
Ed Novick
Costume Designer
Sharen Davis
Stunt Co-ordinators
Jeff Dashnaw
Chad Dashnaw

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Production Companies
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures and Columbia Pictures present in association with LStar Capital and Village Roadshow Pictures a Pin High/Escape Artists production
A film by Antoine Fuqua
A Fuqua Films production
Executive Producers
Walter Mirisch
Antoine Fuqua
Bruce Berman
Ben Waisbren

Cast

Denzel Washington
Sam Chisolm
Chris Pratt
Josh Faraday
Ethan Hawke
Goodnight Robicheaux
Vincent D'Onofrio
Jack Horne
Byung-Hun Lee
Billy Rocks
Manuel Garcia-Rulfo
Vasquez
Martin Sensmeier
Red Harvest
Haley Bennett
Emma Cullen
Peter Sarsgaard
Batholomew Bogue
Luke Grimes
Teddy Q
Matt Bomer
Matthew Cullen

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing UK

The town of Rose Krick, the American West, 1879. Bartholomew Bogue, an infamous robber baron operating out of Sacramento, leads a gang of hired thugs into a church meeting where the locals are discussing Bogue's plan to take over the town and the gold resources beneath it. This leads to a massacre. One of the survivors, Emma, decides to collect the town's money and hire gunmen to provide protection from Bogue and his army. She makes contact with Sam Chisolm, a federal marshal from Kansas, who takes the job when he hears Bogue's name and begins to assemble a team: gambler Josh Faraday; Goodnight Robicheaux, an ex-Confederate sniper; Billy Rocks, a Chinese blade specialist; Jack Horne, an ex-Indian fighter and mountain man; Red Harvest, a Comanche brave; and Vasquez, an outlaw from Mexico. After clearing Rose Krick of lawmen in the pay of Bogue, Chisolm and his posse train the remaining residents as a citizen militia, and they brace themselves for Bogue's inevitable reprisal, laying traps in anticipation of the battle to come. At Chisolm's request, Bogue comes to Rose Krick at the head of his army. Only Chisolm, Red Harvest and Vasquez survive the ensuing melee. Left alone with Bogue, Chisolm reveals the motives for his taking the job: Bogue was responsible for killing his family and taking their land. Emma shoots Bogue. Avenged, Chisolm rides away.

Mechanic Resurrection

USA 2016
Director: Dennis Gansel
Certificate 15 98m 33s

Reviewed by Tim Hayes

If ever a film could stir the assassins' trade union into breaking cover and suing for damage to their reputation, *Mechanic: Resurrection* might be it. Teetering over the parody precipice in both content and form, its harshly illogical action is matched by drastically compressed pacing, as if the plot were late for a bus. Every film with a hitman in hiding will have someone sidle up and say, "You're a hard man to find," but this one does so mere seconds after Dennis Gansel's director credit. So much for scene setting. And when hitman-in-hiding Bishop (Jason Statham) meets Gina (Jessica Alba), she volunteers her role as bait in a trap in the very same conversation. So much for suspense.

So much too for any trace of the Arthur Bishop originally hewn from a block of granite shaped like Charles Bronson in Michael Winner's *The Mechanic* (1972), or for any rational comment from him about the myth of redemptive violence. Bishop Mark I's taste for Hieronymus Bosch came from a bleached 1970s ennui, before he was out-ennuied all the way to the grave by younger model Jan-Michael Vincent, a surf-honed malcontent stewing in California's id.

When Statham took over the role for a 2011 remake, the story was glossed, but Bishop still appeared to be an earthman – unlike here, where unseen transfusions of Kryptonian jungle juice have turned him into another gravity-defying bulletproof miracle-worker. A sequence in Brazil – all in that off-putting shallow focus that accompanies being filmed nowhere nearer Latin America than Bangkok – ends with Statham leaping from a Sugarloaf cable car and landing on the sail of a passing hang glider, matching any of several Cruises, Diesels or Johnsons capable of arriving via the same swan dive.

After that, every computer is hacked by a single click and every sanctum breached in seconds, until Bishop materialises within the sealed strongroom of arms dealer Max Adams (Tommy Lee Jones) with no explanation at all. Jones, prowling a hidden submarine base in the style of not just a generic Bond villain

Hard as nails: Jason Statham, Jessica Alba

but the actual villain of *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977) – though in pyjamas – livens the film briefly, before returning to whatever world tour brought the actor into *Criminal* (2016) at about the same time. He fares better than Alba, stuck with bikini and hostage duties, or Michelle Yeoh, denied the chance to kick anyone in the face – or indeed Statham, who opts not to kindle his well-practised spark of self-amusement.

Instead, he and the film play it all wearyingly straight, as if 15-certificate slaughter were a style choice in itself rather than an empty vehicle awaiting actual style. The rising tide of hyperbolic cinema was never likely to lift all boats, and puts disastrous strain on the fragile self-awareness required of films that wish to entertain via violence but stay non-committal about the potent underground currents being tapped. You end up with the kind of affair that goes to some effort to slather Bishop in shark repellent before a dip in tropical waters, but can't stretch to any sharks for him to actually repel.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
John Thompson
Robert Earl
David Winkler
William Chartoff
Screenplay
Philip Shelby
Tony Mosher
Story
Philip Shelby
Based on characters created by Lewis John Carlino
Director of Photography
Daniel Gottschalk
Film Editors
Michael J. Duthie
Todd E. Miller
Ueli Christen
Production Designer
Sebastian T. Krawinkel
Music
Mark Isham
Sound Recordist
Sirapob Tungkasaeranee
Costume Designer
Preeyanan Suwannathada
Stunt Co-ordinator
Allan Poppleton

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Production Companies
Summit Entertainment and Millennium Films present a film by Dennis Gansel
A Chartoff Winkler production and Millennium Films production
Executive Producers
Avi Lerner
Brian Presley
Trevor Short
Mark Gill
Boaz Davidson
Frank DeMartini
Steven Chasman

Cast
Jason Statham
Arthur Bishop
Jessica Alba
Gina
Tommy Lee Jones
Max Adams
Michelle Yeoh
Mei
Sam Hazeldine
Crain
John Cenatiempo
Jeremy
Toby Eddington
Adrian Cook
Femi Elufowoju Jr
Krill

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

Rio de Janeiro, the present. Former assassin Arthur Bishop has faked his own death and is now living in hiding. However, he is found by agents of arms dealer Crain, who wishes him to kill three targets. Bishop flees to Thailand, hiding out with old friend Mei and meeting an American, Gina, whom he saves from an attacker. Bishop realises that Gina is a lure sent by Crain, but they grow close nevertheless, and he confides in her that Crain was a boyhood friend. Crain kidnaps Gina, compelling Bishop to agree to the three killings. The first is a warlord in a Malaysian jail, which Bishop infiltrates before poisoning his target and escaping. The second is a crooked businessman, whom Bishop murders in his swimming pool. In Bulgaria, Bishop approaches the third target, Max Adams, with a proposal that they should work together against Crain. Adams agrees, and his death is faked. Meanwhile Bishop attacks Crain on his boat, fighting an army of mercenaries. He incapacitates Crain, who has rigged the vessel to explode, and rescues Gina. The blast kills Crain and apparently Bishop too, but he later reunites with Gina in Cambodia. Adams realises that Bishop has escaped death once again.

Morgan

USA/United Kingdom 2016
Director: Luke Scott
Certificate 15 91m 49s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

In his endless tinkering with *Blade Runner*, Ridley Scott has seemed inclined to a reading of the film whereby the replicant-hunting Deckard (Harrison Ford) is himself an android, set to persecute his own kind. Rather touchingly, Scott seems under the impression that this is a radical and interesting twist rather than a tired old saw no science-fiction magazine would have touched after 1950 and already done to death in multiple episodes of *The Twilight Zone* and *The Outer Limits*, not to mention the likes of the extraordinary yet not very good *Creation of the Humanoids* (1963).

The misapprehension is evidently genetically transferable, for Ridley's son Luke Scott trots out exactly the same gotcha at the end of the acceptable SF/horror hybrid *Morgan*. There is, though, a sly joke here in that a crew of experts in Frankenstein science don't think to wonder whether sleek-suited executive Kate Mara is human, because they expect someone like her – "from corporate" – to act the way she does (she's all about "potential revenue streams"), even when she's shinning her way out of a science compound in pursuit of their girl-cyborg experiment and engaging in vigorous robot-fu in the woods. Seth Owen's functional script withholds from the audience what ought to be common knowledge among the characters – that such creatures exist in the world of the film – just to keep the uncertainty going for a punchline that depends on the cyborgs' odd quirk of examining their deadly hands in moments of calm.

For all its predictability, *Morgan* is fairly engaging, with an overqualified cast giving it their all. Anya Taylor-Joy, the big-eyed girl from *The Witch* (2015), is blue-tinged and sinister as hoodie-sporting experiment Morgan. After being tutored to fit in with regular people, she has learned at least one emotion – furious rage – but is otherwise clueless about human beings, knowing mostly that they break easily. Paul Giamatti is good if brief value as the outside shrink who insists on interviewing Morgan without safety glass (taking a more direct approach than the Voight-Kampff test of *Blade Runner*, but with much the same upshot),

Mean machine: Anya Taylor-Joy

while Brian Cox purrs briefly as the business brains of the scheme. Toby Jones (twittering shiftily), Rose Leslie, Jennifer Jason Leigh (with eyepatch), Vinette Robinson (flashing some Pam Grier martial-arts skills) and Michelle Yeoh are a mixed-up bunch of mostly maternal boffins. The men on the team are interestingly feminised: the trim-bearded hunk who's advertised as a 'nutritionist' is basically the cook. Intriguingly, the third-act crisis that gets most of the scientists killed is precipitated by their attempt to protect their creation – a reversal of the usual Frankenstein theme of the ill-treated monster that has to be spurred to go on a rampage.

Set in an old dark Addams Family house and a concrete science bunker in the middle of pinewoods (shot in Northern Ireland), *Morgan* has a potent gothic science fiction atmosphere and decent enough fight scenes. What it doesn't manage is much sense of dread. Like her hapless handlers, audiences are too hardwired to sympathise with Morgan, who evokes enhanced waifs like Hanna and Lucy more than the female death gadget of *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines*, to be worried about her murdering everyone in sight, especially since the ostensible heroine is blatantly a killbot in a suit.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Ridley Scott
Michael Schaefer
Mark Huffman
Written by
Seth Owen
Director of Photography
Mark Patten
Film Editor
Laura Jennings
Production Designer
Tom McCullagh
Music
Max Richter
Production Sound Mixer
Derek Hehir
Costume Designer
Sefano De Nardis
Stunt Co-ordinator
Paul Herbert

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Production Companies
Twentieth Century Fox presents
Scott Free Productions
Made in association with TSG Entertainment with the partial assistance of the European Regional Development Fund through Northern Ireland Screen
Executive Producers
Aidan Elliott
George Heller
Elishia Holmes

Cast
Kate Mara
Lee Weathers
Anya Taylor-Joy
Morgan
Toby Jones
Dr Simon Ziegler
Rose Leslie
Dr Amy Menser
Boyd Holbrook
Skip Vronsky
Michelle Yeoh
Dr Lui Cheng
Jennifer Jason Leigh
Dr Kathy Grieff
Paul Giamatti
Dr Alan Shapiro
Michael Yare
Ted Brenner
Brian Cox
Jim Bryce
Vinette Robinson
Dr Brenda Fitch

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

A remote science facility, the near future. Girl cyborg Morgan has been raised by a team of scientists under the direction of Dr Ziegler. After a disagreement, Morgan attacks one of the staff, Kathy Grieff. Lee Weathers, a risk-assessment executive employed by the SynSect Corporation, arrives to investigate the situation. Amy, a behaviourist, pleads Morgan's case, and the girl professes regret over the incident. Lee observes that most of the team, including Kathy, are attached to Morgan and protective of her. Dr Shapiro, a psychiatrist specialising in artificial intelligence, interrogates Morgan to assess her stability; she kills him. When Lee steps in to terminate Morgan, Amy and her colleagues protect their creation. However, Morgan quickly murders most of the team, and then escapes with Amy. Lee finds that Ziegler has committed suicide. With Skip, the team's cook, Lee tracks down Morgan and, after a fight, drowns her. She also executes Amy and Skip.

The SynSect board is happy with the results of the test, which has proved that Lee – an earlier, combat-model cyborg – is superior to Ziegler's creation.

My Scientology Movie

United Kingdom 2015
Director: John Dower
Certificate 15 99m 17s

See Industry, page 12

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

All Scientology films are, like happy families, alike. Unavoidably, they will include a potted biography of L. Ron Hubbard, describing how he used his experience writing pulp science-fiction to create a pseudo-science of self-realisation – 'Dianetics'; an incredulous exegesis of Hubbard's 'theology', with its billion-year time-spans, cosmic wars and alien souls trapped in human bodies; stupefaction at the church's Hollywood connections, material wealth and obsessive secrecy; and accusations by former Scientologists of manipulation and abuse within the church. It is now accepted, even demanded, that the film will include evidence of Scientologists or their hirelings harassing the makers – the *locus classicus* is John Sweeney's fit of bad temper in 2007, when he was caught by a camera raving at Scientologists who had been following him for weeks while he was making the BBC *Panorama* film 'Scientology and Me'.

My Scientology Movie is a commendable and partly successful attempt to move beyond the clichés. At the beginning, Louis Theroux says, in voiceover, that he has for years dreamed of being the first journalist to see a more positive side of Scientology. This is perhaps disingenuous: I am a fan of Theroux's bright-eyed, well-mannered, avowedly uncynical approach to his subjects – his critics are mistaken to charge him with sneering – but his films work partly because he can rely on his audience to sneer for themselves. It is understandable that the Church of Scientology wanted nothing to do with him.

Having failed to get the church's cooperation, Theroux came up with a different approach: taking his cue from Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* (2012), he advertised for actors to take part in dramatic reconstructions, hoping that art would reveal more than mere facts could. A lot of the early part of the film consists of footage of auditions for the roles of David Miscavige (Hubbard's successor as head of the church, and subject of a number of allegations of psychological and physical abuse) and Tom Cruise, Scientology's most celebrated recruit. The film cuts between actors speaking from transcripts of Miscavige's speeches and the speeches themselves: among other things, this suggests just how difficult it is to summon up Miscavige's degree of rage and obsessiveness, how far these lie outside the compass of ordinary human emotion.

At the auditions, Theroux is assisted by Marty Rathbun, formerly the church's 'inspector general of technology' and now one of the highest-profile defectors, who comments on the performances and occasionally joins in. One of the more intriguing threads of the film is Rathbun's increasingly tetchy relationship with Theroux. Their tensions are exacerbated by boredom and paranoia as, of course, Scientologists start to shadow and harass them as they drive around California, visiting sites of special scientological interest. Rathbun featured prominently in Alex Gibney's more conventional and forensic documentary for HBO, *Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief* (2015), but there his presence was neutral – he was a witness, not a subject. Theroux's chatty

Battlefield mirth: Louis Theroux

manner, cameras rolling all along, prompts him to expose more of a complex and dark personality and of the sense of persecution that Scientology cultivates in adherents and opponents alike.

The film has some very funny moments: attempts to scare Theroux off crumble into incongruously gentle comedy when they run up against a blank wall of good nature and crumble into incongruously gentle comedy, ineffectuality being a surprisingly effective defence against fanaticism. The dramatic reconstructions are interesting, and revealing enough to make me wish they'd been given more space to develop; as it is, the film feels scattershot, ricocheting off different angles – re-enactments, encounters with ex-scientologists, road trips – perhaps too concerned with avoiding the pitfalls of a conventional documentary to settle on a theme or tone.

If you want to understand Scientology, *My Scientology Movie* is well worth watching in conjunction with Gibney's film. But you might just skip it and watch Paul Thomas Anderson's wonderful *The Master* (2012), a supreme example of the art that scoops mere facts.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Simon Chinn
Written by
John Dower
Louis Theroux
Director of Photography
Will Pugh
Film Editor
Paul Carlin
Composer
Dan Jones
Production Sound Mixer
Steve Hopkins

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Production Companies
BBC Films & BBC Worldwide present a Red Box Films production
Executive Producers
Christine Langan
Charlotte Moore
Joe Oppenheimer
Stephen McDonogh
Mark Reynolds

presented by
Louis Theroux

In Colour [1.85:1]

Distributor
Altitude Film Entertainment

A documentary in which Louis Theroux explores the Church of Scientology. Having failed to gain access to the organisation itself, Theroux recruits actors to take part in reconstructions, with advice from rebel Scientologist Marty Rathbun. As filming progresses, Theroux is followed by a mysterious white van, receives letters from lawyers Carter Ruck and is filmed while working; attempts to observe a Scientology compound lead to confrontations during which the police are called. Theroux's relationship with Rathbun is beset by tensions. A re-enactment of abuse within the organisation is agreed to have been successful.

The Neighbour

USA/United Kingdom 2016
Director: Marcus Dunstan
Certificate 18 86m 44s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

According to a pre-credits caption, there's an old American proverb that warns, "Don't measure your neighbour's honesty by your own." It's an appropriate point of entry for this indie thriller, which offers a new wrinkle on the familiar bad-guy-next-door scenario. Here, the concerned protagonists are far from blameless innocents: a young couple lying low in rural Mississippi, where their house is a staging post for a modest drug-running operation. All of which means that when their sinister biker-dude neighbour drops by with a couple of cold ones, their worry about what he's actually doing in his basement is significantly outweighed by the fear that he's spotted the traffic in their driveway and might be on to their little secret.

It's a simple but effective scenario, and the movie is at its best when it trusts to the uneasy power of its concept. Cast as the hero, there's something innately shifty about leading man Josh Stewart, whose steely reserve also suggests that he's not going to give up his hard-earned cash so easily. When the disappearance of his girlfriend (Alex Essoe, adequate) sends him into the basement next door, we follow him through a sustained intervention made all the more unsettling by director Marcus Dunstan giving the over-busy electro score a break and instead slipping on a psychedelic rock ballad showcasing nerve-tingling female vocals – suddenly we're transported to early 1970s *giallo* territory, palms a-sweating. It's the highlight of the picture, though throughout Dunstan blocks out the action with confident control of geographical veracity, ensuring that the tension hits the red zone just before the mayhem explodes.

At times, the film hints at the no-frills impact of Jeremy Saulnier's *Blue Ruin* (2013) and *Green Room* (2015), though Dunstan and writing partner Patrick Melton still have a way to go before they achieve the richness of characterisation and thematic interest Saulnier shapes from his barebones material. In this instance, Stewart's reluctant drug-runner and Bill Engvall's psychopath-next-door share a moment in recognising that unfortunate economic circumstances were the catalyst driving both of them into darker moral terrain, but the script doesn't really follow through on it.

The boor next door: Josh Stewart

For Dunstan, however, this latest offering, much more reliant on suggestion than brutal carnage per se, does show a filmmaker with ambitions beyond the horror fanbase for his scripts for *Saw IV* to *Saw VI* and his two previous features – *The Collector* (2009) and *The Collection* (2012) – which pitted doughty Stewart against an evil antagonist with a booby-trapped lair primed to slice and dice. Here, Dunstan seriously overdoes the fake Super 8mm inserts with no apparent formal justification, but there's a telling moment elsewhere when the villainous neighbour, making a video of his nefarious handiwork, maintains that it's enough just to raise the hammer over the victim's head rather than crash it down on bone and flesh. "Let the camera do the work," he says, and it could be a positive move for Dunstan if he himself continues to take those words to heart.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Patrick Rizzotti
Brett Forbes
Producers
Marcus Dunstan
Patrick Melton
Written by
Patrick Melton
Marcus Dunstan
Director of Photography
Eric Leach
Edited by
Andrew Wesman
Production Designer
Mars Feehery
Score
Charlie Clouser with Peter Freeman
Sound Mixer
Richard Gizzi
Costume Designer
Andrea Federman

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Production Companies
Anchor Bay Entertainment presents in association with The Salt Company a Fortress Features production in association with Three Point Capital
Executive Producers
Shaun Redick
Ray Mansfield
Patrick Stapleton
Mitchell Grobman
Tims Johnson
Rick Moore
Josh Thomashow
James Norrie
Ali Jazayeri
Viviana Zarragoitia
Anthony Sgro
Jason Egan
Bonnie Forbes

Cast
Josh Stewart John, 'Johnny'
Alex Essoe Rosie
Melissa Bolona Sarah
Skipp Sudduth Neil
Ronnie Gene Blevins Harley
Luke Edwards Cooper
Bill Engvall Troy
Jacqueline Fleming Officer Burns
Mason Guccione Cole
Heather Williams Debrah
David Kallaway Guillermo
Ben Mathney Punk
Chaka DeSilva The Runner

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Arrow Films

Festival title
The Neighbor

Rural Mississippi, present day. Couple Johnny and Rosie work for Johnny's uncle Neil, earning their cut from a drugs ring. They plan to leave and start a new life when they've made enough money, but Neil is unaware of this plan. Meanwhile neighbour Troy has been watching their house. When Rosie goes missing, Johnny sneaks into Troy's large house and discovers her and another captive, Sarah, caged in the basement. When he goes to fetch the bolt cutters he needs from his toolbox, he realises that local policewoman Burns is in cahoots with the kidnapping racket, which Troy runs with his sons Harley and Cooper. The latter surprises Johnny, who retaliates and kills him. Johnny frees Rosie and Sarah but is chased by Troy and Harley, who shoot suspicious new arrival Neil before he can drive the three to safety. Troy, Harley and Burns, furious after discovering Cooper's body, recapture the fugitive trio. While Burns prepares to torture Johnny, Rosie turns the tables on Harley and kills him, then rescues Johnny by killing Burns. Sarah slips off her handcuffs only to be apprehended by Troy, who in turn is killed by Johnny – though not before warning that his criminal colleagues will give chase. Sarah awaits the arrival of the police, while Johnny and Rosie make it to the coast, unaware that they are being watched.

NG83 When We Were B Boys

United Kingdom 2015
Directors: Claude Knight, Luke Scott, Sam Derby-Cooper

Reviewed by Sam Davies

NG83: When We Were B Boys pinpoints almost the minute that breakdancing blew the minds of Nottingham's youth: a ten-minute performance by a New York crew in the Old Market Square in 1983. Using interviews with a small group of veteran Nottingham b-boys and breakers, it lovingly evokes the explosive impact of this new subculture – rather like cubism hitting figurative painting, it literally turned dancing on its head and spun it, adding previously unimagined dimensions and directions.

The film also captures the excitement, the feeling of potential energy unleashed, as groups of previously aimless teenagers from Sneinton or Hyson Green suddenly self-organised into crews such as the Assassinators, Rock City Crew or Supreme Force, with auditions, training schedules and uniform tracksuits. Starting on pavements covered with rolled-out sections of lino, they soon found themselves approached by potential sponsors, by local TV, by promoters wanting them for displays in Manchester, then London, then Paris, even Beirut.

International forays aside, *NG83* is unashamedly local and personal in its focus. In one sequence, DJ Jazzy Jay from the foundational New York hip-hop crew Zulu Nation visits, and is taken to a pedestrian bridge in the Victoria shopping centre – a key spot, since its glossy polished floor is perfect for breaking, both frictionless and out of the rain. The film is full too of local characters such as Barry ('Audiotron'), who walked the streets of Nottingham evangelically pumping out electro from his ghetto blaster (handcuffed to his wrist in case of muggers) – except when passing people in phone boxes, in which case he would carefully turn it down.

But co-directors Sam Derby-Cooper, Claude Knight and Luke Scott also capture the emotional hangover when all this energy and organisation began to dissipate, as adolescence became adulthood and popular culture evolved away from breaking. Annie ('Lady McD') McDevitt tells the story of the rivalry that drove the city's crews to ever more complex routines before finally culminating in a contest between the Assassinators and Rock City Crew. The actual winners of this face-off were disputed, but crucially, with the championship bout over, the momentum and drive of the scene had peaked and begun to ebb away, along with its participants. The hip-hop code insists 'once a b-boy, always a b-boy', and Supreme Force veteran Karl ('DJ D2'), makes the brave assertion that his current career as a postman and his past as a breaker aren't really so different (they both need routine, discipline and...).

But the deliberate nod in the film's title to *When We Were Kings* (1996) makes its elegiac undertow clear. Most of the breakers' reminiscences as local stars of the scene are sharply bittersweet, with an acute sense of loss and anxiety that the world moved on without their breaking exploits leading them further. The saddest of these stories is that of Lady McD's brother Lloyd 'K.I.D' McDevitt, who was found dead in 2012 after drifting into depression when the breaking scene dissolved and his musical career stalled with it. *NG83* concludes with a memorial dance-off and all-

Time of their lives: *NG83: When We Were B Boys*

crew reunion held in his honour at Rock City.

But if *NG83*'s consciously local focus is one of its strengths, it is also often a weakness. There are numerous points where more context would have added a dimension to the story. How did the crews feel about the intense territorial snobbery in hip-hop? About coming from Nottingham versus London, let alone the Bronx or Queens? Was the scene always going to burn itself, out or was it simply overtaken by the developing rave scene, with its different music, drugs and dancing? At its inception, hip-hop culture was a four-way fusion of breaking, graffiti, DJ-ing and rapping. The latter three are only glancingly brought in – and the lack of any of the major cuts and breaks that soundtracked the era leaves *NG83* sonically underwhelming. But it remains a lovingly produced document of teenagers having the time of their lives, and captures one link in the history of dancing, connecting disco and Northern Soul (which also adopted American subcultures, with marathon dance competitions) and the hyperactive futurism of the streetdance crews that still burst off talent-show screens today.

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Claude Knight
Writer
Luke Scott
From an original idea by Claude Knight, Luke Scott
Camera Operators
Sam Derby-Cooper
Will Wilkinson
Editor
Sam Derby-Cooper
Sound Recording
Al Curtis
Jack Lindley
Tracey McMaster

©NG83 Productions
Production Companies
Heritage Lottery funded in association with EM Media
An NG83 production in association with EM Media

Supported by Heritage Lottery Fund

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Pipoca

A documentary about the breakdancing scene in 1980s Nottingham, seen from the present-day perspective of five key crew members and breakers, who discuss its impact on their lives then and since.

Norfolk

United Kingdom 2015
Director: Martin Radich
Certificate 15 83m 4s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

Norfolk's title may refer to the county where it was mostly shot, but it also suggests the word's Anglo-Saxon root, meaning 'northern people'. Some characters here speak English, some don't, and some don't speak at all. The film is sometime near the present but in a very different world from our own: the state has broken down and medieval lawlessness reigns. As in Michael Haneke's *Time of the Wolf* (2003), the cause of the breakdown is unexplained, to some extent because the story is told from the viewpoint of an unnamed adolescent boy (Barry Keoghan) whose knowledge is limited to what his father (Denis Ménochet) has allowed him to find out. Nevertheless, their dilapidated farmhouse contains a large number of cathode-ray TV sets that continue to receive broadcasts.

The narrative is simple but opaque – a major part of the action is prompted by the father receiving orders to kill from a mysterious figure speaking through one of the televisions – and what resonates is the environment that writer-director Martin Radich and his collaborators, especially composer J.G. Thirlwell, field recordist Chris Watson and sound designer John Sampson, have created out of Norfolk's wetlands and big skies. Jets are heard but not seen, men out of uniform salute one another, communication is by military radio, and the non-English farmworkers the father is sent to kill live in barracks; but no one mentions any war. Radich may have had an allegorical intent in showing an attack on apparently Eastern European farmworkers, but the father, with a trace of an accent, is an outlander himself.

The boy is just old enough to understand that the extended parables in which his permanently glowering father typically speaks are transparent ploys to keep him in line and away from other people; but one of the film's surprises is that when he begins to rebel, by pursuing one of the farmworkers (Goda Letkauskaite), also unnamed, whom his father has specifically told him to avoid, he is let off. She, on the other hand, is beaten by her equally forbidding-looking kin, and has her head shaved. The film's exploration of adolescent sexuality in an elusively dystopian setting brings to mind early Ian McEwan, though 'sexuality' is pushing it slightly. In their main scene together, aboard a rowing boat on the Norfolk Broads, the boy delivers quite a sweet and emotionally articulate speech that once again undermines our expectations, given his apparently cloistered upbringing.

A call to farms: Barry Keoghan

Less contrary to expectations is having the girl unable to vocalise her rebellion, or her response to the boy's entreaties. Nor has she anything to say when the father tells her of how he met the boy's mother (now dead, possibly as a result of his actions). She has one muttered utterance in the whole film. Part of the trouble with having so many expectations overturned is that those which aren't, as here, stand out in greater relief; more often, however, anything seems to go, leaving the impression of mystification pursued for its ownsake.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Finlay Pretsell
Rachel Dargavel
Writer
Martin Radich
Cinematographer
Tim Sidell
Editor
Mark Trend
Production Designer
Beck Rainford
Composer
JG Thirlwell
Production Sound Mixer
Phil Cape
Sound Design
John Sampson
Wildtrack Sound
Chris Watson
Costume Designer
Emma Rees

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Production Companies
Creative England, BBC Films and BFI present an SDI Productions, Crybaby Films & iFeatures production
Developed with the assistance of BBC Films
Made with the support of Creative England, the BFI's Film Fund
Executive Producers
Christopher Moll
Steve Jenkins
Christopher Collins
Tristan Goligher

Cast

Denis Ménochet
man
Barry Keoghan
boy
Goda Letkauskaite
girl
Eileen Davies
old woman
Sean Buckley
old man
Rupert Proctor
farmer
Olegar Fedoro
worker 1
Trevor Fox
the figure
Jason Beeston
worker 2
Paul Watkins
worker 3
Lubomir Bukov
worker 4
Ella Vale
woman

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
SDI/Crybaby

Norfolk, the near future or recent past. In a lawless society, possibly in the aftermath of war, an unnamed father and his adolescent son live in an isolated and rundown farmhouse. The father is targeted by some older locals, who want to kill him for reasons unknown. When the boy finds himself attracted to a girl he sees with a group of foreign farmworkers, his father warns him to avoid her. The father is instructed by a mysterious figure on television to destroy the compound where the farmworkers live. He makes preparations to do so in his bunker.

The girl seeks out the boy, and in defiance of his father he begins to court her. On her return to the compound she is beaten by one of the older men and her head is shaved. Later that night, the father attacks the compound with explosives. The boy ineffectually hits him on his return, and generally criticises him. But it transpires that the father has spared the girl, keeping her in his bunker. Meanwhile the boy finds his way to the older locals, who reveal themselves to be his maternal grandparents; they tell him that his father was responsible for his mother's death. The father manages to kill the man they have sent to kill him, and parlays with his parents-in-law, bringing about peace. Later, the grandfather dies on a boat out on the Broads, possibly poisoned by his son-in-law. The father and son are reconciled, and are joined by the girl.

One More Time with Feeling

United Kingdom/USA/France 2016
Director: Andrew Dominik
Certificate 15 112m 34s

Reviewed by Jonathan Romney

It's a painful irony that the last Nick Cave documentary, Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard's *20,000 Days on Earth* (2014), ended with a wonderfully humanising image of the singer and his two sons Arthur and Earl sharing a pizza in front of the TV. Andrew Dominik's *One More Time with Feeling* inevitably comes across as a sequel to that image: this new portrait of Cave was made following Arthur's death last year, aged 15, after a fall from cliffs near the family's Brighton home.

One More Time with Feeling, which carries a closing dedication to Arthur, does not explicitly discuss the incident; the film, screened globally in a one-night release to accompany Cave's new album *Skeleton Tree*, is partly targeted at a fanbase who will be familiar with its background. But grief is the theme running through both Dominik's film and the new Cave songs it contains – these are more seemingly improvisational than usual, looser in structure and involving an incantatory singing style, with Cave's spare lyrics backed by the densely layered sounds masterminded by the Bad Seeds' resident magus figure, violinist and keyboard player Warren Ellis.

Throughout the film, Cave proves extremely open to discussing his feelings – perhaps not that surprisingly, following the revealing confessionals with psychoanalyst Darian Leader in *20,000 Days*, but what is surprising here is his readiness to address raw emotional wounds. Sometimes heard in voiceover, sometimes talking directly to Dominik, he talks about how, after a tragedy, "you have to renegotiate your position in the world". Most unsettlingly, he talks appreciatively about the compassion shown to him by complete strangers, then adds, "But when did you become an object of pity?" He makes it clear that his new work is part of a process of attempting to understand a world changed beyond recognition: "Things have been torn apart... I'm desperately trying to make narrative sense of it." His wife Susie Cave, fleetingly glimpsed in *20,000 Days*, emerges fully here, talking about her work as a dress designer and her need to be creatively active; in a very poignant moment, she also displays a painting that Arthur made when he was five.

Therapeutic process: Nick Cave

Given the sensitive nature of the events alluded to, and the songs they appear to have inspired, or at least inflected, it might seem strange that Dominik – known today as a Hollywood hard-hitter of a decidedly left-field artistic bent, as in *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007) and *Killing Them Softly* (2012) – should have decided to use 3D, a format sometimes considered inherently trivialising. Dominik makes no bones about the difficulty of getting a handle on a complex filming process; shot in harsh, high-contrast black-and-white (with one colour sequence), the film begins with Dominik and his crew trying to calibrate their equipment. He asks an increasingly irritated Cave to re-enact a series of inconsequential actions, undermining from the start the illusion of documentary spontaneity. The cumbersomeness of the filming method is always evident – Dominik doesn't hide the circular tracking equipment surrounding Cave's piano. The director, heard off screen, also comes across as a clumsy, sometimes inarticulate interviewer. But somehow, intentionally or otherwise, all this distracting business becomes part of a therapeutic apparatus that allows the film's subjects to let their guard down and open up.

Certainly, the film doesn't seem in any way spectacular – except for a colour sequence for one song near the end, a slightly bathetic move into familiar music-video language. At the start, the emphasis on close-ups and contained spaces makes the 3D seem redundant. But the technique later comes into its own in opening up the space of the recording studio, which becomes cavernous and sometimes hallucinatory: in one sequence, Cave, in the control room, seems to watch himself sing, while in another, Ellis, viewed from a distance through layers of glass, conducts a string section. One-off touches in individual sections perhaps dilute the involvingly claustrophobic concentration of the whole – a series of 'mugshot' images of everyone involved, some disarmingly beautiful shots of significant places around Brighton. But overall, Dominik's film works persuasively as a showcase for the new songs, and as a cautious but intelligent investigation of the – conventional, but here, vividly real – notions that tragedy might perhaps fuel creativity, and that art might help in managing grief.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Dulcie Kellett
James Wilson
Directors of Photography
Alwin H. Küchler
Benoît Debie
Editor
Shane Reid
Sound Recordist
John Currie

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Production Companies
Iconoclast and Pulse present a Dulcie Kellet/JW Films production
A film by Andrew Dominik
Executive Producers
Brian Message
Charles-Marie Anthonioz
Thomas Benski
Mourad Belkeddar
Marisa Clifford
Nicolas Lhermitte
Julia Nottingham
Anna Smith Tenser
Lucas Ochoa

Featuring
Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds:
Nick Cave
Warren Ellis
Martyn Casey
Thomas Wydler
Jim Sclavunos
George Vjestica

Else Torp
Susie Cave
Earl Cave

In Black & White and Colour [2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Picturehouse Entertainment

Documentary. Singer-songwriter Nick Cave and his band the Bad Seeds record their latest album 'Skeleton Tree', following the death of Cave's 15-year-old son Arthur. The singer and his wife Susie Cave discuss their experience in their Brighton home.

Phantom Boy

France/Belgium 2015
Directors: Alain Gagnol, Jean-Loup Felicioli
Certificate PG 84m 40s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

With their expressionist hand-drawn 2D animation and quirky themes, the films of French animators Jean-Loup Felicioli and Alain Gagnol are the polar opposite of CGI-laden Hollywood blockbuster cartoons. The directors gained an Oscar nomination for their arrestingly stylish and Hitchcockian burglary tale *A Cat in Paris* (2010), showing a knack for thoughtful, family-friendly *film noir* that carries through into this new crime caper. Here, shadows of several sorts lengthen over desperately ill tween hero Leo, who discovers that his phantom self can fly free over Manhattan while his body is stuck in hospital. Teaming up with maverick cop Alex, also hospitalised after an on-the-job beating, he takes on 'the Face', a Joker-ish gangster holding the city hostage with a system-crushing computer virus.

Poignant and pacy in equal measure, the film creates a gorgeously cubist New York, full of strong blocks of colour, through which Leo's phantom swoops and arcs, chasing the Face's gang through shadowy docksides and car parks. The drama races and twists satisfyingly, as Alex uses phantom Leo's eagle eye and a mobile phone to help girl reporter Mary do battle with the villains in their lair, *Rear Window*-style.

Right from the punchy Saul Bass-like titles, the film's high-contrast shadows, thriller plotting and hard-boiled chat ("You're not a thorn in my side, you're a pair of porcupine pants," moans Alex's police boss) infuse it with *noir*-ish atmosphere. Swapping competitive quips, Alex and the spirited Mary give off an almost 1940s feel, which the film underlines with its retro visuals (boxy cars, vintage-styled clothing). Despite drawing on a host of influences, notably cartoonist Richard Sala's dark, stylised underworld, and the Picasso-style fractured planes of the Face's head, the directors' free-flowing images feel pleasingly original. Part of the film's pleasure is that they know just how much to throw into the mix. A nod to *Manhattan* (1979) in a soaring bridge shot, and a canter through a strip club straight out of *The Sopranos* (Leo's shocked POV only takes in naked lower legs) add amusing texture, without being tediously knowing.

Leo's illness (his baldness hinta at cancer) brings a different kind of darkness to the story, which the film handles with delicacy. Flitting around his mother as a phantom, Leo sees her brave hospital face give way to an agonised crying jag, but his plight is never allowed to become maudlin. His crime-fighting is a metaphor for battling illness, with the script plaiting the two together adroitly when he spends too long out of his body to help Mary defeat the Face and fades into a coma as a result. There's real peril here. Yet it is mixed in with a slapstick pratfalling strand, centred on the Face's bumbling sidekicks, frequently tripped up by their inept thuggery. Vincent D'Onofrio's crowing menace as the Face adds greatly to the fun, and is the standout feature of the excellent voice work in the English-dubbed version.

The film's cracking pace means that it doesn't develop the touching central characters that made *A Cat in Paris* sparkle. But it has considerable charm and emotional range, aided by Serge Besset's score,

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whose jazzy power amps up the film's eye-catching Manhattan set pieces, as Leo's phantom tumbles down from the Statue of Liberty's torch or swoops like a comet between Times Square's neon-splashed skyscrapers.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by/ Producer – France
Jacques-Rémy Girerd
Producer – Belgium
Annemie Degryse
Written by
Alain Gagnol
English Script Adaptation
Michael Sinterniklaas
Editing
Hervé Guichard
Myriam Copier
Pauline Coudurier
Graphic Design
Jean-Loup Felicioli
Music
Serge Besset
Sound Design
Loïc Burkhardt
Artistic Directors
Alain Gagnol
Jean-Loup Felicioli
English Voice Director
Michael Sinterniklaas
English Language Produced by
Eric Beckman
David Jesteadt
Sophia Harvey

©Folimage, Lunanime, France 3 Cinéma, Rhône-Alpes Cinéma
Production Companies
Jacques-Rémy Girerd, Annemie Degryse present a Folimage, Lunanime, France 3 Cinéma, Rhône-Alpes Cinéma co-production
With the participation of Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, Canal+, Cine+, France Télévisions
With the support of Région Rhône-Alpes, Département de la Drôme, Ciclic – Région Centre Media, Fonds Audiovisuel de Flandres (VAF), Screen Flanders, Agence Flamande de l'Entreprise, Flandre en Action, Tax Shelter du Gouvernement Fédéral Belge, GeniouS, Btech, Businvest, Business & Systems Integration, Crosswise
Associate producers: France 3 Cinéma, Rhône-Alpes Cinéma
A film by Alain Gagnol & Jean-Loup Felicioli
With the participation of Région Rhône-Alpes, Valence Romans Sud Rhône-Alpes, Département de la Drôme
With the help of Flanders Image
Developed with the support of MEDIA's Program of the European Community
Written with the Council of Ciclic-Région Centre-Val de Loire
Executive Producers
Emmanuel Bernard
Tim Martens
Michel Nicolas

Voice Cast

English-language version
Fred Armisen
the little guy
Vincent D'Onofrio
the face
Jared Padalecki
Alex
Melissa Disney
Mary
Bill Lobley
Captain Simon
Dana Snyder
the mole
Marcus D'Angelo
Leo
Rachel Salvatierra
Lily
Joey Camen
the big guy
Brian T. Delaney
father
Phil McGlaston
the mayor/Hammer
Eileen Stevens
mother

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Soda Pictures

New York, present day. Eleven-year-old Leo tells his sister Lily crime stories. Hospitalised with a possibly terminal illness, he discovers that he can leave his body and for brief periods fly invisibly through the city as Phantom Boy. A gangster known as 'the Face' holds New York to ransom, threatening that his computer virus will shut the city down in 24 hours. Working with hospitalised police officer Alex, Leo's phantom tracks down the Face's gang, who have kidnapped reporter Mary. Leo helps her escape by reporting back to Alex so that he can aid her via her mobile phone. Leo becomes increasingly ill. The Face's thugs come to kill Alex in hospital, and briefly hold the unconscious Leo hostage. Leo's phantom finds Mary held captive on the Face's ship. The police ignore Alex, who helps Mary stop the computer virus by relaying Leo's reports to her by phone. Leo's phantom is fading. He will die if the phantom is out of his body for too long. He stays to help Mary escape from the Face by diving off the ship. Leo's phantom fades completely, putting Leo into a coma. Lily reads Leo's crime story, imploring the Leo character in it to return. He wakes from his coma. Alex and Mary become a couple.

Queen of Katwe

USA 2016
Director: Mira Nair
Certificate PG 124m 7s

Opening move: Madina Nalwanga, Lupita Nyong'o

See Feature on page 18

Reviewed by Jason Anderson

American journalist Tim Crothers knew he'd found something special when he began researching a feature about a Ugandan prodigy who'd emerged from a chess programme for impoverished children in Katwe, a shantytown outside Kampala. As desperately poor as any other inhabitant of one of Africa's worst slums, Phiona Mutesi was an illiterate nine-year-old when she joined the programme by chance. Mentored by Robert Katende – a Christian sports ministry coach who tried using chess to engage the kids who had no interest in soccer – Phiona would become Uganda's national champion and a world-class player by the age of 15. "She just had all the elements of the perfect underdog story," Crothers later said of the extraordinary youngster, the subject of a feature he wrote for *ESPN* magazine in 2010, which he then expanded for his 2012 book *Queen of Katwe*.

Since this saga already meets all the requirements of an inspirational Hollywood sports drama, there's hardly a need for any of the augmentations that usually accompany true stories like this on screen – the training and competition scenes with cutaways to stern-faced coaches and glowering rivals, the heartstring-tugging musical score, the regularly scheduled swings between our hero/heroine's advances and setbacks before we reach the climactic triumph. But given that this bears the Disney brand, it shouldn't be surprising that director Mira Nair and screenwriter William Wheeler have loaded up their telling with all of those elements on the off chance that viewers would otherwise go unroused or unmoved.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Lydia Dean Pilcher
John Carls
Screenplay
William Wheeler
Based on the ESPN magazine article and book by Tim Crothers
Director of Photography
Sean Bobbitt
Editor
Barry Alexander Brown
Production Designer
Stephanie Carroll

Original Score Composed by
Alex Heffes
Sound Mixer
Nico Louw
Costume Designer
Mobolaji Dawodu

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Production Companies
Disney presents in association with ESPN Films a John B. Carls, Cine Mosaic, Mirabai Films production
A Mira Nair film
Executive Producers
Will Weiske
Troy Buder
Film Extracts
A Fork, a Spoon & a Knight (2014)

Cast

David Oyelowo
Robert Katende
Lupita Nyong'o
Nakku Harriet
Madina Nalwanga
Phiona Mutesi
Martin Kabanza
Mugabi Brian
Taryn 'Kay' Kyaze
Margaret Night Nantongo
Esther Tebandeke
Sarah Katende
Ntare Guma Mbaho Mwine
Tendo
Ethan Nazario Lubega
Mukumbya Benjamin
Nikita Waligwa
Gloria Nansubuga
Ronald Ssemaganda
Ivan
Peter Odeke
Enoch Barumba
Philip Luswata
Minister Aloysius Kyazze
Joanitta Beluwira-Wandera
Mrs Gali
Ivan Jacobo
young Buyinza Richard
Nicolas Levesque
older Buyinza Richard
Babirye Stellah
Stellah

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Buena Vista International (UK)

The Kampala shantytown of Katwe, Uganda, 2007. Phiona Mutesi, a young girl, helps her widowed mother Harriet provide for the family by selling vegetables. Phiona and her brother Brian are intrigued by the children's chess programme run by Robert Katende, a former soccer player who now works for a Christian sports ministry. Phiona excels at the game; Harriet is concerned about the effect this new passion will have on their already difficult lives. Robert faces resistance from officials who are wary of letting slum children enter the national youth competition. However, the success of Phiona and her teammates silences the doubters. Phiona's family situation worsens when older sister Night runs off with her boyfriend, and then a car accident and hospital stay for Brian lead to the family's eviction from their home. Phiona is defeated at the Youth Chess Olympiad in Russia. Flooding in Katwe imperils her family, including the now pregnant Night. Robert turns down an engineering job in order to maintain his commitment to his team. At a competition in 2011, Phiona initially struggles but rallies to victory. Returning to Katwe, she and Robert take Harriet to the new home that Phiona has been able to buy as a result of her success.

It's easy to lament *Queen of Katwe*'s often formulaic, sometimes ham-fisted presentation, designed as it is to produce maximum tear-wringing and foster as much excitement as can be derived from the sight of two people silently sitting over a chequerboard full of oddly shaped little pieces. Yet the best of it also displays many of the virtues of Nair's finest films, most notably the empathy for young characters and the vividness of setting of her international breakthrough *Salaam Bombay!* (1988). Nor is it the first time she's explored a Ugandan story: her romantic drama *Mississippi Masala* (1991) opened with a depiction of the travails of a diasporan Indian family being expelled from the country by Idi Amin. And however many changes her team has made to ensure the film's potency as a crowdpleaser, the most important one was an addition they *didn't* make: for there to be an almost total absence of white faces in the cast of a worldwide Disney release remains highly unusual, and possibly unprecedented.

Nair has also preserved a few of the harder edges and tougher questions in Phiona's history, even if others have inevitably been softened and simplified. The Katwe of the film may be a less horrific place than the one described by Crothers, but Nair's movie still emphasises the miseries and cruelties endured by Phiona and her family in ways that are both powerfully dramatic (for example, the flood of filthy water that destroys their home and nearly drowns Phiona's youngest brother) and relatively subtle (such as the competitor who wipes his hand after shaking hers at the beginning of a match).

Of course, little can be done to negate the radiance and charisma of Lupita Nyong'o as she gamely tries to disappear into the role of Phiona's mother Harriet. That may be why she's less convincing as an emblem of maternal suffering than the livelier woman she becomes in her fiercest displays of defiance, and in the surprisingly lusty sequence where she goes to sell a dress to a merchant who's evidently an old flame.

As Katende, David Oyelowo has less opportunity to bring texture to his character, though his own occasional bursts of exuberance – showing off his soccer skills in an effort to raise funds for a chess trip – help to dispel the stodgier air of earnestness that can make *Queen of Katwe* heavy-going. As Phiona, Ugandan teen Madina Nalwanga (who was discovered at a community dance class) is at her best when she's able to deviate from the film's most familiar pathways. She's especially effective at conveying a quintessentially teenage kind of pique when Phiona struggles to readapt to Katwe's deprivations after savouring the privileges of chess-world celebrity.

Not that Nair seems to find the game itself very interesting, or at least very cinematic. The match sequences are too hectic to convey quite why Phiona is so talented or how she develops into such a formidable contender. Several exchanges of dialogue sag under the weight of laborious metaphors about finding "safe squares", and how a pawn can become a queen. In the process of ensuring this African story has the widest possible appeal, Nair makes moves that even a neophyte player would see coming. Thankfully, though, that's not the sole extent of her strategies here.

Richard Linklater Dream Is Destiny

USA 2016
Directors: Louis Black, Karen Bernstein

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

There are a few perspicacious comments made by the assembled talking heads in *Richard Linklater: Dream Is Destiny*. Ethan Hawke, who has worked with Linklater on seven films to date, observes that many of the director's movies begin as "kind of ideas everyone's had" – and this isn't meant as an insult, but a tribute to the protean appeal of Linklater's cinema. Probably the best observation, however, belongs to Matthew McConaughey, who gets at the uniquely conflict-averse nature of Linklater's recent work when he says that his old friend is "so Buddhist he doesn't even know he's Buddhist".

I admire Linklater's accomplishments as a filmmaker, and his output has long seemed to me to represent a particular Texas back-porch varietal of Zen, though at times while watching *Dream Is Destiny* I found myself wondering: hasn't this guy ever done anything to piss anyone off? Cut somebody off in traffic, at least?

Early on in the film there is a valedictory montage of Linklater and collaborators scooping up awards for their long-game gamble *Boyhood* (2014), and the congratulations barely stop from that moment on. Linklater's variegated career has had its ups and downs, of course, in terms of popular and critical reception – less-loved titles such as 1996's *SubUrbia* and 2005's *Bad News Bears* are hardly represented here at all – but *Dream Is Destiny* was put together at a moment of enormous public affirmation, and seeks to analyse the secrets of a serenely successful creator as he passes a quarter of a century of doing steady work on his own terms. Through interviews with Linklater as he peruses old journals and assorted ephemera, and through the testimonials of collaborators, what emerges is a vindication of, per Jack Black, "just hard work".

Linklater's films, which tease at an autobiographical aspect, may give an impression of the artist as a laidback good ol' boy – and there is certainly something of this in the director who, as McConaughey tells it, "never says no" – but what is drawn out at some length here is an aspect of his personality that is downright puritanical. Among the relics that he is seen discussing with Louis Black, co-founder of the South by Southwest festival and the film's co-director, is an old notebook dating back to when he was in his early twenties, in which he details his every expenditure, most of which involves Pepsi and movie tickets. Linklater cites the influence of Thoreau, which might also be seen in his pond-side compound in secluded Bastrop, though there's also more than a touch of the tightwad gospel of Ben Franklin that so appalled William Carlos Williams: "A penny saved is a penny earned" and all that.

The *other* recent film about Linklater, Gabe Klinger's *Double Play: James Benning and Richard Linklater* (2013), delved into the relationship between his twin passions for structuralist and poetic cinema and baseball. *Dream Is Destiny* is rather more polished and prosaic, a portrait that locates its subject in the American, Franklin-esque tradition of the 'self-made man'. This isn't a bogus approach – Linklater, the only filmmaker I can remember citing Sherwood Anderson in an interview, certainly has his prosy side. If inessential viewing, *Dream Is Destiny* stays on the right side of overkill. There are some dubious moments, as when Kevin Smith shows up unquestioned to talk about how independent filmmaking outside New York and Los Angeles was "unheard of" before Linklater, as though Texans Tobe Hooper and Eagle Pennell and Larry Buchanan had never existed. But on the whole it's a perfectly likeable movie that convinces you Linklater is the one thing most folks already knew he was, which is a helluva likeable guy.

Richard Linklater

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Louis Black
Karen Bernstein
Director of Photography
David Layton
Editor
Nevie Owens
Composer
Graham Reynolds
Sound Recordists
Erik Clabeaux
Damion Haux
Ben Lazard
Sean McCormick
Martin Pederson
Renee Stairs
Michael Swanner

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Production Companies
Black/Bernstein Productions and Arts+Labor present in association with Picturebox a film by Louis Black
Executive Producers
Alan Berg
Abe Zimmerman
John McCall
Amy McCall
Anne Akiko Meyers
Film Extracts
Slacker (1990)
It's Impossible to Learn to Plow by Reading Books (1989)
Dazed and Confused (1993)
Waking Life (2001)
Before Sunrise (1995)
Before Sunset (2004)
Before Midnight (2013)
SubUrbia (1996)
The Newton Boys (1998)
Tape (2001)
School of Rock (2003)
Fast Food Nation (2006)
Bad News Bears (2005)
Me and Orson Welles (2009)
A Scanner Darkly (2006)
Bernie (2011)
Boyhood (2014)
Badlands (1973)
The Magnificent Ambersons (1942)
WarGames (1983)
Andrei Rublev (1966)
The Shining (1980)
A Clockwork Orange (1971)
Over the Edge (1979)
Some Came Running (1958)
Woodshock (1985)
Everybody Wants Some!! (2014)

With
Louis Black
interviewer
John Pierson
Ellar Coltrane
Tommy Pallotta
Kevin Smith
Patricia Arquette
Matthew McConaughey
Ethan Hawke
Richard Linklater
Chuck Linklater
Tricia Linklater
Jacque Linklater
Clark Walker
Jonathan Demme
Michael Barker
Sandra Adair
Kent Jones
John Sloss
Julie Delpy
Jonathan Sehring
Jack Black

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Dogwoof

A documentary portrait of Texan filmmaker Richard Linklater, covering his upbringing in Houston and Huntsville, his first attempts in the arts, his surprise hit 'Slacker' (1991), his ventures into Hollywood studio filmmaking, his eventual retrenchment in his home base, and the success of his 12-years-in-the-making 'Boyhood' (2014). Linklater sits down with 'Austin Chronicle' editor Louis Black, also the film's co-director, looking through boxes of juvenilia and recalling his creative journey. This footage is intercut with excerpts from Linklater's filmography. Each production is commented on by experts and collaborators, including Jack Black, Matthew McConaughey, Patricia Arquette, Julie Delpy and Ethan Hawke. Early home movies, behind-the-scenes footage and original material shot during read-throughs and on the set of Linklater's most recent film 'Everybody Wants Some!!' are also included.

Sembène!

USA/France 2015
Directors: Samba Gadjigo, Jason Silverman
Certificate 12A 89m 22s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

What factors drive one individual to be, as Samba Gadjigo puts it here, "stronger than his destiny" – equipped to resist all that life appears to have planned for him, and blaze an unmapped trail instead? In the case of Gadjigo's friend, inspiration and occasional tormentor Ousmane Sembène, the answer seems to be a mix of personal qualities, happenstance occurrences and historical shifts, which are chronicled in this thoughtful and absorbing account of his life, co-directed by Gadjigo and Jason Silverman.

Growing up in a village in Senegal, Sembène started life steeped in the values of a fisherman father who told him: "I've never worked for a white man and I never will." But Sembène's own restlessness and curiosity led him away from rural life: he moved first to Dakar, then stowed away on a ship to Marseille, where he worked on the docks. There he was drawn both to leftist politics, becoming a member of the European communist party, and culture, immersing himself in European art. A back injury that saw him laid up for six months provided ample opportunity to read – and to observe the absence of authentic African experience in the literary and artistic canon. "It's not us who create our own image," Sembène said. "It's others who present the image of black people – of Africans."

The awakening of Sembène's intellect, creativity and political ideals coincided with a dawning of interest in class and racial politics in Europe and the US, and with the upheavals in his native Africa that saw Senegal and 16 other nations claim their independence in the single year of 1960. Amid this tumult, Sembène published a number of novels, but soon came to see filmmaking as a more direct route to the consciousness of ordinary people. He studied filmmaking for a year in the Soviet Union before returning to the newly independent Senegal to become the first ever sub-Saharan African to make films in Africa, for African audiences and with an African cast and crew. His first feature-length work, *Black Girl* (*La Noire de...*, 1966), made him a figure of international interest and led to his being invited to be the first African member of the Cannes film festival jury.

For Gadjigo, a gently engaging presence here as narrator, talking head and key character, Sembène's novels and films were a revelation. Having grown up wishing only to emulate the intellectual culture of France, the young Gadjigo was suddenly introduced to a figure who made him, as he puts it, "proud to be an African". That Sembène had risen from such humble origins cemented the case for hero-worship. "You say he was a dockworker? He's self-taught? This guy is GOD. That's how I saw Sembène."

Gadjigo's deity would turn out to be an unquiet and demanding one. The academic's repeated attempts to make contact, and to use his position to help promote Sembène's work abroad, met with a degree of stonewalling that is presented rather comically here but makes explicit a significant aspect of Sembène's character: a curmudgeonliness that rendered him notoriously hard to work with or to know. The two men eventually became friends and collaborators, with Gadjigo's work as event organiser, publicist and translator helping to establish the international esteem in which Sembène is now held. But Gadjigo's experience of rejection and hard-won comradeship inflects the tone of the film, which makes no bones about the trickier aspects of Sembène's personality and legacy – particularly the chapter in which he appropriated money from a fund for new Senegalese filmmakers to make his own picture instead. "I've said that I'll sleep with the devil or the she-devil to get my films made," he said at the time. "But you should judge the films – not Ousmane Sembène."

Neither is a straightforward undertaking. To the uninitiated, the tag 'father of African cinema' – which Sembène resisted – and the attentions of clusters of activists and celebrities over the course of his career might seem to position him as a box-ticking emblem of diverse 'world cinema' – a namecheck for the politically correct. Yet exposure to the films reveals a more multiply challenging figure – one whose work resisted a binary opposition between black virtue and white culpability, insisting that African success if measured by the standards of colonisers was no success at all. His films engage not so much with racism as with the complex structures, both psychological and bureaucratic, left behind by colonisation. He ridiculed black Africans who collaborated with or adopted the values of colonial regimes; rejected any sentimental protection of tribal traditions, right up to his final film, the tour de force against genital mutilation *Moolaadé* (2004); and was a stern critic of Islam, which was the target of *Ceddo* (1977) and which he called "an invading force, a religion that was more often than not imposed on us at gunpoint".

This film succeeds in capturing the man's uncompromising dedication, his charisma and his perplexing personality. Other aspects come across less clearly. His literary career is given scant attention. The content and evolution of his politics – themes of specific films apart – are somewhat sketchily filled in; and the influences on his filmmaking – the impact, for instance, of Italian neorealism and the French New Wave – go unattended. Perhaps most striking is the patchy coverage of his intimate life. Though we are introduced to a son, Alain Sembène, whom we learn is of mixed racial origins, no information is forthcoming about his other parent. Two other sons, Moussa and Makar, are thanked in the credits but otherwise not mentioned, and the second of Sembène's two wives, American Carrie Moore, crops up briefly in archive footage only to fade from view once more. Perhaps this is Gadjigo honouring his master's own reticence on personal matters. Perhaps it's just that there's too much to say about this most multifaceted of men to fit into one documentary. In any case, as a primer, a spur to further study and a testament to Samba Gadjigo's tireless torch-bearing, this has more than enough to recommend it.

Containing multitudes: Ousmane Sembène

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Jason Silverman
Samba Gadjigo
Written by ['A film by']
Samba Gadjigo
Jason Silverman
Additional Writing/ Story Development
Ricardo Acosta
Camera
David Aubrey
Jim Bitterman
Salvador Bolivar
Cliff Charles
Abdoul Aziz Cisse
Justin Francese
Samba Gadjigo
Matt Gulley
Allison Humanek
Terryl Loffler
Jason Silverman
Editor
Ricardo Acosta
Original Score
Ken Myhr
Sound Recordists
David Aubrey
James Becker
Jeremy Kessler
Danny Nidel
Galen Mullins
Nick Rumancik

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Production Companies
Impact Partners, New Mexico Media Partners in association with SNE Partners, Joaquim Duarte Gomes with support from Ford Foundation Just Films, Sundance Institute, Cinereach, Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie
A film by Samba Gadjigo, Jason Silverman
Major funding provided by Ford Foundation Just Films, Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program
Executive Producers
Dan Cogan
William T. Conway
Andy Pinkes
Joaquim Duarte Gomes
Film Extracts
Emitaï (1971)
Guelwaar (1992)
La Noire de.../ Black Girl (1965)
Borom Sarret (1963)
Xala (1975)
Ceddo (1976)
Camp de Thiaroye (1988)
Moolaadé (2004)

In Colour [1.78:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Aya Distribution

A documentary on the life of Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembène (1923-2007), narrated by American-based Senegalese academic Samba Gadjigo, who explains how his own African identity and scholarship of African culture were shaped by Sembène's influence, and how he has sought to promote and his legacy around the world.

Set the Thames on Fire

United Kingdom 2015
Director: Ben Charles Edwards
Certificate 15 83m 25s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Set the Thames on Fire, the second feature-length film from Sadie Frost and Emma Comley's production house Blonde to Black Pictures (the first was the Southern Gothic melodrama *Buttercup Bill*, 2014), was premiered at Palm Springs and opened this year's Loco London Comedy Film Festival in April. It's the debut feature from director Ben Charles Edwards, whose training as a painter isn't hard to deduce. His ultra-dark-comedy dystopia plays out against a vividly realised backdrop of a collapsing London mired in grunge and sinking into the Thames, all under the impassive gaze of a vast, pale-blue moon. The sets are rich in imaginative detail, from the yellow-and-black 'DANGER' tapes shoring up the countless disintegrating buildings and the squishy talking camera wielded by drag-queen Dickie (Noel Fielding) to the black crayfish who helps fortune teller Colette (Sally Phillips) with her card readings. Ancient dial telephones adorn almost every desk and table. (Mobiles, it seems, have ceased to exist, and there's little sign of the internet.)

As those artefacts suggest, *Set the Thames on Fire*'s dystopia shares comedy-retro elements with Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985) and Richard Ayoade's *The Double* (2013). There's more than a hint of Marc Caro and Jean-Pierre Jeunet's exuberantly bloodthirsty *Delicatessen* (1991) in the mix too; and Gerard McDermott's crude, pustular city-boss, the Impresario, even stirs memories of Ralph Richardson's fur-clad local dictator from *Things to Come* (1936). (He's apparently a hereditary ruler: Colette relates how her family lost their wealth "during the Impresario's father's reign".) Amid the soggy desolation, a perky female voice makes bright announcements over the tannoy: "Through hell and high water, working together for a happier city... because happiness is going down with the ship... All transportation cancelled until further notice."

Edwards's London, like an update of Hogarth's, is peopled with grotesques. Alongside

Grotesques: Noel Fielding, Gerard McDermott

the repellent Impresario and the predatory, aggressively lipsticked Dickie, we meet the despairing, deathwish-haunted Magician (David Hoyle) in his tatty ruff, homophobic landlady Mrs Hortense (co-producer Sadie Frost), several roving cops wearing gas masks and armed with tasers, and a supporting horde of gothickly clad extras, all overacting their socks off. Amid this lurid extravaganza, the two leads, melancholic piano player Art (Michael Winder) and wide-eyed romantic Sal (Max Bennett), evidently intended to represent innocence in the jaws of decadence, get rather overshadowed, though there's a touching pathos in Art's stumbling retelling of Oscar Wilde's story 'The Happy Prince' – shorn, of course, of Wilde's sentimental ending. The plot lacks momentum, too, often freewheeling when a touch of narrative urgency feels needed, and the eventual fate of the Impresario is fudged. But in this 'Agony in Three Acts' (as it styles itself), story matters rather less than atmosphere, and action a lot less than fantasy. Al Joshua's score, drawing on Satie's wistful 'Gymnopédie No 1', abets the sardonically downbeat mood, and fans of offbeat, richly textured black comedy will find plenty to divert them.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Emma Comley
Sadie Frost
Writer
Al Joshua
Director of Photography
Sergio Delgado
Editor
Darren Baldwin
Production Designer
James Hatt
Composer
Al Joshua
Sound Designer
Patch Rowland
Lead Female Costume Designer
Charlotte Sparre
Costume Designer
Jeffrey Michael
©Blonde to Black Pictures Ltd
Executive Producer
Andrew Green
Ben White

Cast
David Hoyle
the Magician
Sadie Frost
Mrs Hortense
Sally Phillips
Collette
Lily Loveless
Emily
Portia Freeman
Pop-Pop
Noel Fielding
Dickie
Gerard McDermott
the Impresario
Margot Charles-Edwards
the Dog
Michael Winder
Art
Max Bennett
Sal

In Colour [2.35:1]
Distributor
Blonde to Black Pictures

London, the near future. The Thames has flooded and much of the city is under water. Art, a young pianist, is booked to play at a club called the Concentration Camp. Meanwhile Sal, a young drifter shut in an institution, escapes and makes his way to the club. Inside, the Impresario, boss of the city, browbeats the other guests with the help of his sidekick Dickie. Colette, a fortune teller, reads his tarot, unnerving him, then leaves with her daughter Emily. Sal rescues Art from a bully; the two become friends and lovers. Sal suggests they go to Egypt together.

Mrs Hortense, Art's landlady, berates him for not paying his rent. Sal has sex with her. At the Reeperbahn Club, Art and Sal meet Colette and Emily, who invite them to tea. They also encounter an aged magician, who takes them back to his place, where he gets Sal to suffocate him with a pillow. At Colette's flat Emily is attracted to Sal; Colette advises the youths to steal money to get to Egypt. At the Candy House they evade Dickie, who wants to have sex with them. They then rob the Impresario; eyes closed, he thinks they're girls sent by Dickie to give him a massage. When he finds out, he kills Dickie. Emily contacts him, saying she knows where he can find Art. At Colette's flat the Impresario kills both her and Emily. Sal and Art head for the station, but Art returns to his flat to retrieve a love letter. The Impresario is waiting for him and starts beating him violently. As Sal arrives, the Impresario turns his violence on himself, as predicted by Colette. Sal and Art cross the river, as more of London collapses into the water.

Sonita

Germany/Switzerland/The Netherlands/USA/Denmark 2015
Director: Rokhsareh Ghaem Maghami

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

The act of filming is always an intervention, though of what kind is largely dependent on the actions (visible or 'invisible') of the person operating the camera. In the case of *Sonita*, which follows an undocumented 15-year-old Afghan immigrant living in Iran who aspires to become a rapper, director Rokhsareh Ghaemmaghami's intervention isn't just a crucial part of the story, but of her subject's life.

Although there are plenty of traditional fly-on-the-wall *vérité* moments here – we see Sonita interacting with teachers and friends at the Tehran Society for Protection of Working and Street Children, speaking with recording studio managers, navigating bureaucracy to find a new apartment, alone in her bedroom dreamily filling up notebooks with clippings – the intimate, chummy connection between filmmaker and subject is never hidden. In one scene, Sonita, lying in bed, asks Ghaem Maghami to stop filming so that she can take off her headscarf and fall asleep. The director then asks a series of questions about what it would mean for her to be seen without her headscarf; as Sonita drowsily responds, and switches off the light, the film hits on some subtle cultural differences while maintaining a slumber-party vibe. (There are no conventional talking-head interviews to be found.)

But then 'drowsy' is a relative state for a teenager, let alone one as ambitious and forthright as Sonita: her rhymes are all about the problems faced by Afghans, explicitly child marriage, physical abuse, the ongoing war and being undocumented. (In one of the documentary's most moving moments, a friend who's been sold to a 30-year-old man by her family briefly breaks down after hearing one of Sonita's raps and says, "That's exactly what I would like to tell my father.") Traumatised by her passage into Iran and struggling to get by with little money, Sonita faces even more heartache when her mother demands that she be sold into marriage in order for her older brother to pay his bride's dowry. While Ghaem Maghami has shown herself turning down Sonita's previous pleas for cash for studio time, the Iranian director becomes deeply upset by the prospect of abandoning Sonita into the arms of a stranger back in Afghanistan. Despite protests from her crew (the boom mic operator argues that Sonita's mother is just trying to extort her), the director ends up paying Sonita's family $2,000 in exchange for six more months of freedom. During this time, Ghaem Maghami helps Sonita shoot a music video, enter into an international music competition (where she wins 'Best Female Performer' and 'Best Performer Overall' – a rather loaded double honour)

To boldly go: Sonita Alizadeh

and gain admission to Wasatch Academy, an elite college preparatory school in Utah.

Ghaem Maghami's transition from filmmaker to guardian is marked by a simple fade to black and some explanatory text – she doesn't show much of herself debating whether or not to pay, nor the actual exchange of cash. (There are plenty of agonising scenes where Sonita's mother argues with other people about selling her, which demonstrate an unpleasant universal truth: more often than not injustice gets passed down – if I had to do it, so should you.) And, aside from showing the difficult conversations that come with being the primary caretaker of a teen refugee, the film doesn't really concern itself with any criticisms of Ghaem Maghami's or Sonita's actions, which involve lying to her family in order to secure her safe passage to the US.

Instead, the film reveals the gradations of difference and protest possible within Iranian and Afghan society: Sonita is free not to be forced into marriage for quick cash in Iran, but she isn't totally free to pursue her dream due to the country's prohibition on female singers. This isn't just for the benefit of western audiences who, after nearly 40 years of anti-Iranian sentiment, believe it to be our greatest enemy, or have lumped all countries in the Middle East and North Africa into the 'hopelessly repressive for women' basket. Rather, it's a call to Iranians to re-evaluate their own attitudes towards what is acceptable behaviour for women. But even more universally, above all else, Ghaem Maghami's intervention seems to prove that action is better than inaction.

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Gerd Haag
Directors of Photography
Behrouz Badrouj
Ali Mohammad Ghasemi
Mohammad Haddadi
Arastoo Givi
Torben Bernard
Parviz Arefi
Ala Mohseni
Editor
Rune Schweitzer
Score Music
Moritz Denis
Sound
Mohammad Salehi
Hadi Saed Mohkam
Ali Alavi

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Production Companies
TAG/TRAUM, Intermezzo Films, Rokhsareh Ghaem Maghami present
Supported by Der Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien, Film- und Medienstiftung NRW, NDR, arte, Cinéforom, Loterie Romande, IDFA Bertha Fund, RTS Radio Télévision Suisse, SRG SSR, Chicken & Egg Pictures, Office Fédéral de la Culture OFC, DR
A film by Rokhsareh Ghaem Maghami
A production by TAG/TRAUM
In co-production with Intermezzo Films, Rokhsareh Ghaem Maghami, NDR, RTS Télévision Suisse, SRG SSR, DR
In co-operation with arte
Funded by BKM - Der Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien, Film- und Medienstiftung NRW, Bundesamt für Kultur, EDI, Cinéforom et Loterie Romande, Chicken & Egg Pictures, IDFA Bertha Fund

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
New Wave Films

A documentary shot over three years in Iran, Afghanistan and the US. Sonita, an Afghan teenage refugee living in Tehran, wants to be a rapper. Her mother returns from Afghanistan and demands she marry, and doesn't care about her music career. The documentary's director pays the mother $2,000 in order to give Sonita six more months of freedom. Sonita's music video becomes popular, attracting the attention of the Strongheart Group, a US-based non-profit organisation. Sonita and the director obtain a passport and visa to the US, where Sonita goes to high school.

Starfish

United Kingdom 2016
Director: Bill Clark
Certificate 15 94m 47s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

A starfish, Tom Ray tells his small daughter Grace at the start of this film, can regrow limbs if it should happen to lose any. Not so for Tom himself, who soon afterwards falls victim to a devastating bout of sepsis, which robs him not only of all his lower limbs but also parts of his face – and his secure and loving relationships with Grace and her mother Nicola. Nicola is pregnant at the time of Tom's sudden illness; a new son, Freddy, is born into a violently altered family unit. Tom, a writer, has previously undertaken the bulk of childcare while Nicola works; but though he may have been evolved enough not to find stay-at-home fatherhood emasculating, he now finds himself disempowered in a far more literal and dramatic manner. Nicola's happy declaration that "it's my turn to support you for a change" takes on an irony only a shade less bitter than the scene with the starfish.

Such forceful emphasis on the cruelty of fate is characteristic of a film that depicts its characters' situation – drawn from a true story – in resolutely gruelling terms. Even flashbacks to Tom's childhood, far from offering him comfort or helping us to connect to cheerier parts of his history, are bleak, centring on an angry, cold and ultimately absent father. This makes for an admirably uncompromising evocation of a desperately tragic situation, but a tough sell in dramatic terms. For most of the film, everything just gets worse; the nihilistic message seems to be that however hard you might try to overcome a negative family legacy, fate will find a way to turn you into a parody of your worst parent; and the viewer occupies a state of agonised frustration at the family's inability to have a frank conversation about a life-altering state of affairs. Any joy or solace Nicola might have accessed via their new baby is kept firmly out of view; nobody appears to have a single friend they can talk to; and even the colour palette seems relentlessly grey. Tom Riley meets the challenge with his performance

Apart from everything: Tom Riley, Ellie Copping

as Tom, shifting from almost irritating levels of sunniness to impenetrable brooding surliness.

Once catharsis does come, it's both wildly welcome and well handled, with stupendous delivery of a convincing accusatory/confessional outpouring from Joanne Froggatt as Nicola. And the stubborn resistance to softness through most of the film perhaps earns it the right to its slightly sentimental concluding scene, in which Tom proves himself still capable of minor acts of paternal heroism via the application of extreme and unstinting effort. In today's fraught climate of representation, there may be those to whom this inspirational moment sends a negative message regarding the 'overcoming' of disability and the push to appear 'normal'. In the context of this story, however, it feels like an appropriate way to end – flat-out joyous compared with what's gone before, but still realistically downbeat. The issues of the previous scenes remain, and aren't going anywhere, but hope is stored in the possibility of small acts of reconnection to the world.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Pippa Cross
Melanie Paton
Ros Hubbard
Written by
Bill Clark
Director of Photography
Clive Norman
Editor
Carmela Iandoli
Production Designer
David Bryan
Composer
Paul Saunderson
Sound Mixer
Craig Barlow
Costume Designer
Alison McLaughlin

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Production Companies
Genesius Pictures, Unlimited Pictures in association with Flix present an Origami Films, CrossDay and What's the Story production
A Bill Clark film
Developed with the support of the Creative England Development Fund
Executive Producers
Debbie Gray
Robbie Little
Julian Gleek
Peter Lang
Claire Best
Diana Phillips
Joanne Froggatt
Graeme Ough
Paul Fullager
Janette Day
Leo Casserly
Paul Hardman

Cast
Joanne Froggatt
Nicola Ray
Tom Riley
Tom Ray
Ellie Copping
Grace Ray
Michele Dotrice
Jean, Nicola's mother
Phoebe Nicholls
Tom's mother
Oliver Cunliffe
young Tom
Joseph McErlearn
Tom's brother
Isla Crowther
Tom's sister
Greg Haiste
Tom's father

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Genesius Pictures

Rutland, the present. Soon before the birth of his second child, writer Tom Ray falls ill with what is initially presumed to be food poisoning but turns out to be multiple organ failure and sepsis. His lower arms and legs have to be amputated, and his nose and mouth are left badly disfigured. His wife Nicola gives birth to their son while he is in hospital. Back home, Nicola is overwhelmed by childcare, mounting debts and her husband's needs. Fitted with artificial limbs, Tom regains some independence but struggles to adjust. The couple are forced to sell their house and move in with Nicola's mother Jean. Told that there can be no further reconstruction of his face, and physically rejected by Nicola, Tom becomes increasingly depressed. He writes to an old friend who has money, explaining the parlous state of the family's finances and requesting a loan. He drinks heavily, treats Nicola coldly and attacks Jean for being overly controlling. Nicola pleads with him to be more positive and more appreciative of the family's efforts. Tom contemplates suicide by drowning but instead returns home, where he sees a neighbourhood boy lose his football over a wall. Tom painstakingly retrieves it, while his family looks on.

The final credits note that the UK sees 150,000 cases of sepsis a year, 44,000 of which result in death – and that Tom's friend never responded to his letter. The real Tom and his family are shown.

Train to Busan

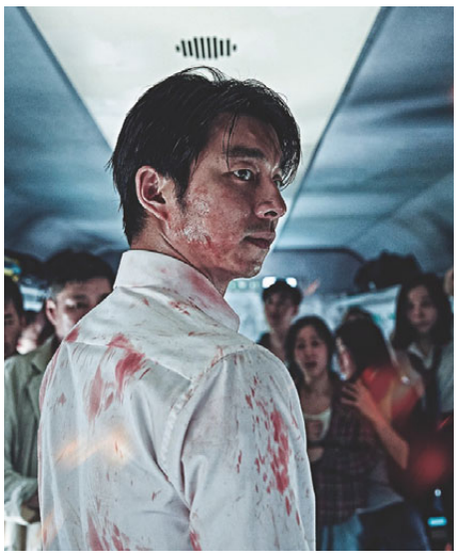
Director: Yeon Sangho

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Anyone who has sat through Yeon Sangho's indie animated features *King of Pigs* (2011) and *The Fake* (2013) knows that he's adept at running with second-hand ideas and that understatement is not in his repertoire. Although he was a fine-art student he may yet turn out to be Korea's answer to Michael Bay; they certainly share a target market of teenage boys, and this live-action zombies-on-a-train movie represents a well-calculated bid for the big time. *Train to Busan* became the fastest-grossing film in Korean history on release in July (that's why it's in UK distribution so soon), and he shrewdly bolstered its chances by releasing the animated prequel *Seoul Station* alongside it. The prequel, of course, features all the large-scale apocalyptic scenes he couldn't afford to stage in live action or CGI here.

Neither *Seoul Station* nor *Train to Busan* wastes any time on explaining the zombie plague that spreads with literally unbelievable speed throughout South Korea. We're told there's been a leak from a biotech facility, we're shown some roadkill coming back to life, but there's no other backstory, no bad science and precious few hints how the zombies will be defeated in the sequel. Most of the film is set on a high-speed train running from Seoul to Busan, evidently boarded moments before Seoul Station was filled with zombies; a newly bitten young woman clambers on as the train starts to move and proceeds to infect the majority of the passengers and crew.

As always in disaster movies the script focuses on a handful of main characters, some of whom experience 'personal growth' as they struggle to cope with the crisis. The main story arc concerns money-man Suh (Gong Yoo, a TV actor making his long-awaited break into movies; he's also in Kim Jeewoon's upcoming *Age of Shadows*), a middle-class fund manager who learns two harsh lessons on the train. First, from his very young daughter, that it was his selfishness and lack of consideration for others that led to his divorce. Second, that his investment fund was a major supporter of the biotech company which inadvertently created



Learning curve: Gong Yoo

the zombies. This being a Korean movie, written and directed by someone who grew up in the student generation which protested in the streets against military governments, there's also a political dimension. Suh has to learn bravery, empathy and self-sacrifice from Sanghwa, a bolshie working-class hero. And Suh's selfishness is thrown into perspective by the real villain of the piece, the corporate fatcat Yongsuk, whose ruthlessly egotistical spoiled-child behaviour deliberately recalls recent scandals involving a ferry company and Korean Air.

Most of the lifts here are from Bong Joonho. The idea of a train with an 'elite' cloistered in First Class has an obvious debt to *Snowpiercer*, and the stuff about brutal military enforcement of infection-containment measures derives from *The Host*. But as we've noted, Yeon does know how to run with second-hand ideas. His fast-moving, acrobatic zombies (yes, he's seen *World War Z*) make possible a couple of really knockout images during the climactic scenes in East Daegu shunting yard.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Lee Dongha
Written by Park Joosuk
Cinematography Lee Hyungdeok
Editor Yang Jinmo
Production Design Lee Mokwon
Music Jang Younggyu
Sound Recording Kang Bongsung
Costumes Kwon Yoojin, Rim Seunghee
Production Companies Next Entertainment World presents a Red Peter Film production
Executive Producer Kim Wootaek

Cast
Gong Yoo Suh Seokwoo
Jung Yumi Sungkyung
Ma Dongseok Sanghwa
Choi Woosik Youngguk
An Sohee Jinhee
Kim Euisung Yongsuk
Kim Su-an Su-an

In Colour [1.85:1]
Subtitles
Distributor Bulldog Film Distribution
Korean theatrical title **Busan Haeng**

An inadequate quarantine zone is set up after a reported leak at YS Biotech. Seoul-based fund manager Suh, recently divorced, takes his neglected young daughter Su-An to visit her mother in Busan as a birthday treat. They catch the high-speed KTX101 train, clashing over minor courtesies with Sanghwa and his pregnant wife Sungkyung. A young woman in distress boards the train at the last moment, and soon infects many passengers with a virus that turns them into ravening zombies. As TV news reports a nationwide crisis, the train is halted at Daejeon; the city is already overrun by zombies. The driver and some passengers manage to reboard the train. Suh realises that the zombies cannot open doors and rely on sight and sound to locate their prey. He and Sanghwa overcome their class resentments and team up with baseball-player Youngguk to fight their way to the carriage where Su-An, Sungkyung and other women are holed up in a toilet. They then find that first-class has been commandeered by the ruthless Yongsuk, determined to reach Busan at any cost. The driver is infected at East Daegu Station while leading a handful of survivors to another engine. Sanghwa dies in a fight; Suh is bitten by the now-infected Yongsuk while fighting him off and leaves the engine to Sungkyung and Su-An. They are forced to walk the final leg into Busan Station, narrowly escaping being shot by the military as suspected zombies.

Urban Hymn

United Kingdom 2015
Director: Michael Caton-Jones
Certificate 15 113m 50s

Reviewed by Sam Wigley

Michael Caton-Jones's first feature since *Basic Instinct 2* (2006) begins with a montage of footage from the London riots of 2011. Amid the chaos, we're introduced to teens Jamie (Letitia Wright) and Leanne (Isabella Laughland), seen visibly exulting in their stash of looted DVD players as the three-chord punk of 'White Riot' plays on the soundtrack. This is not just a crashingly obvious music cue: the teaming of The Clash's 1977 classic with scenes from a riot taking place 34 years later provides early warning of the fudgy unspecificity with which this film invokes recent history.

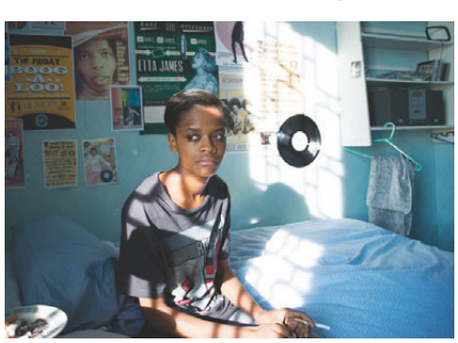
In *Urban Hymn*, the unrest that followed the police shooting of Mark Duggan (a context the film ignores) is only springboard and window dressing for a story of rehabilitation through nurtured talent in the tradition of *Dangerous Minds* (1995). Shirley Henderson is lecturer turned social worker Kate Linton, who – in the aftermath of the riots – takes a job at a home for teenagers and makes it her personal mission to put errant Jamie on the straight and narrow.

At first, the chasm between their two worlds seems impossible to bridge. Repeatedly in trouble with the police following the death of her mother, Jamie is prickly, embittered and disdainful of authority. Kate, meanwhile, harbouring a grief of her own, lives with her husband in a capacious London townhouse, where we see her sinking large glasses of red in front of an open fire. Caton-Jones pointedly underscores this class divide with adjoining scenes of Jamie and her friends tearing it up at a grime night and Kate singing in a plummy community choir.

Of course, as is par for the course in this kind of hug-a-hoodie melodrama, Kate nonetheless manages to forge a connection with her young charge, after she discovers the teenager's love of northern soul. It's not long before Jamie herself is trying out for the choir and is revealed to be a super-talented soprano.

The liability here is a leaden and rather pious script by Nick Moorcroft. Carrying the film, Wright can count as a genuine discovery, sensitively portraying her character's slow awakening to her own potential as she's held back by loyalty to ne'er-do-well Leanne (also a very fine, sullen performance by Laughland). But, beyond 'affluent do-gooder with a sad past', Henderson hasn't been given enough of a character to work with. She looks suitably ashen and drained, but Kate's fraught home life with a husband losing his patience is too clunkily drawn to create any dramatic ballast.

It's difficult to know what *Urban Hymn* is



Musical awakening: Letitia Wright

driving at. Early on, we hear the then prime minister David Cameron talking after the riots: "These riots were not about poverty... No, this was about behaviour. People showing indifference to right and wrong." Backed with a pushily emotive piano score, the film presents an establishment of benign professionals, from policemen to care workers to parole officers to local choirmasters, which seems to emphasise how ample and embracing society is for those who play by the rules. This is a world where even disenfranchised youths can become 'good', law-abiding, middle-class citizens – provided they have showstopping musical talent to spare.

Pity poor Leanne, who doesn't. She's set on an even more destructive path after her best friend is wooed away to a life of neutered respectability. Leanne gets a cheer when she uses D batteries inside a sock to see off some jailhouse bullies, but the last stop on *Urban Hymn*'s join-the-dots trajectory finds the fortunes of the two friends diverging starkly. As one goes up and the other down, lyrics on The Verve's similarly titled album *Urban Hymns* might come to mind: "It's a bittersweet symphony, this life." But that's a trite sentiment for a feature-length film to echo, and a swerve from any insight that might have illuminated the climate after that violent English summer.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
John Sachs
Daniel Toland
Andrew Berg
Neil Chordia
Written by
Nick Moorcroft
Director of Photography
Denis Crossan
Editor
István Király
Production Designer
Laura Ellis Cricks
Composer
Tom Linden
Sound Design
Adrian Rhodes
Costume Designer
Rob Nicholls

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Production Companies
Dashishah Global Film Production presents an Eclipse Films production in association with Powder Keg Pictures
A film by Michael Caton-Jones
Produced in association with Head Gear Films and Kreo Films
Executive Producers
Anwar Kawadri
Ibrahim Dashishah
Nick Moorcroft
Meg Leonard
Brian Berg
Phil Hunt
Compton Ross

Cast
Shirley Henderson
Kate Linton
Letitia Wright
Jamie Harrison
Isabella Laughland
Leanne Dixon
Ian Hart
Ian Wilson
Steven Mackintosh
David Linton
Caroline O'Neill
Fiona
Shaun Parkes
Charlie

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Bulldog Film Distribution

London, 2011. Former college lecturer Kate takes a job working at a children's home. Among the residents are friends Jamie and Leanne, who took part in lootings during the summer riots. Kate initially finds it difficult to get through to the two girls, but soon discovers Jamie's love of soul music, and invites her to come along to her community choir. Meanwhile Kate's relationship with her husband suffers; he thinks she's obsessing about the teenagers in order to fill the gap left by the murder of their own child. A talented singer, Jamie establishes herself with the choir, leading to an invitation to audition for a music school. When footage of the two friends looting is handed to police, Leanne and Jamie attack the informants – an episode that lands them in prison. While behind bars, Jamie acquires a guitar and is encouraged to pursue her musical dreams. She subsequently wins a scholarship at the music school. Feeling left behind by her friend, Leanne vents her anger at Kate, setting light to her car and later stabbing her in the street.

When Two Worlds Collide

United Kingdom/USA/Qatar 2016
Directors: Heidi Brandenburg Sierralta, Mathew Orzel

Reviewed by Richard Combs

When Two Worlds Collide: the title has a familiarly apocalyptic ring – familiar, since the apocalypse has become a staple of science fiction (such as 1951's *When Worlds Collide*). But in the case of Heidi Brandenburg and Mathew Orzel's documentary, Earth is not on a collision course with intergalactic bodies but with itself; this has become our own familiar apocalypse.

Since 2007, the Peruvian government has set about the exploitation of its rainforest – its timber, oil and gas – despite the protests of indigenous Amazonian communities at the pollution of the environment and the resulting human cost. A doctor talks of the lead and cadmium that are seeping into his patients' blood from leaking oil: "They are condemned to die."

The struggle against the despoliation is led by AIDESEP (Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest) and its president Alberto Pizango, who cites ILO Convention 169, stipulating that governments must consult when passing laws that affect native people's rights. Against this, Peruvian president Alan García argues that there is a wider community at stake – Peru itself – and that in order to grow, "Peru needs to expand its markets." The collision, or standoff, can be cast in even more extreme terms: between the needs of the nation and "hundreds of natives, with spears, painted faces and native dress" (in a TV commentator's description).

This is the element of theatre that enters into the confrontation, when the AIDESEP protesters make their case by blockading a road used by oil tankers (at a point called the Devil's Curve) and surrounding an oil station belonging to state-owned petroleum company Petroperú. For the protesters, the theatre is a way of advertising the roots and the context of their action; for the politicians and broadcasters, it is simply a manifestation of a primitive mindset, an attempt to halt progress.

The theatre of standoff is shifted in another direction by the style of the documentary itself, by its visual representation of the antagonists as occupants of different worlds. The opening and closing scenes are a hymn to local life around the Amazon, paying great attention to the flora and fauna and the presiding atmosphere of the river (where Pizango declares himself completely at home), evoking the spiritualised landscape studies of Werner Herzog. By contrast, García (who left office in 2011 but made a failed bid to return to power this year) is only ever seen in television footage, along with the members of his government as they debate the rights and wrongs of new laws "specifically meant to eliminate" the communal property of the indigenous people. In purely visual terms, the confrontation between people in suits, shot in grainy colour, and people going about their life on the land (and even the beautifully stilled shots of Pizango, in lambent yellow light, when he is forced to go into temporary exile in Nicaragua) becomes no contest.

There will be wood: *When Two Worlds Collide*

But *When Two Worlds Collide* has the sophistication to go beyond this, beyond the duality of its own title. Among the dead in the two confrontations were 11 policemen (and one who went missing). The latter deaths inevitably became the focus of subsequent TV reporting in Peru, ignoring the many local people who had died and how the bloodshed had begun. The film moves that focus back to the indigenous people, but includes an airy, unresolved sequence that involves a doubling of grief and a kind of doubling of exile. While Pizango waits to go through the process of his two trials, he meets with the father of the missing policeman, whom the film follows on his search for "just one bone" of his son. For a while, the hectic dialectic of the film becomes a different montage as its two worlds move into complementary orbits.

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Taira Akbar
Produced by
Heidi Brandenburg Sierralta
Mathew Orzel
Cinematography
Heidi Brandenburg Sierralta
Mathew Orzel
Editor
Carla Gutierrez
Original Music
H. Scott Salinas
Sound Recording
Taira Akbar
Mathew Orzel
Heidi Brandenburg Sierralta
Jack Weisman

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Production Companies
Yachaywasi Films presents
in association with Ford Foundation\ Just Films
A film directed by Heidi Brandenburg Sierralta, Mathew Orzel
This film was produced with the kind support of Ford Foundation | Just Films, Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program with support from Open Society Foundations, Doha Film Institute, Chicken & Egg Pictures, The Knowledge and Exploitation Fund, Cinereach, Tribeca Film Institute Latin America Fund, Barry Amiel and Norman Melburn Trust, Rooftop Films

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Film Sales Company

In 2007, Alan García, president of Peru, sets about exploiting the Amazon region's timber, gas and oil resources. Alberto Pizango, president of AIDESEP (Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest), argues that this violates the constitutional rights of local people. In 2008, García's government concludes a free-trade agreement with the US and passes laws that abrogate the rights of indigenous people to ownership of their territory. In April 2009, protesters effectively blockade oil supplies and surround one of the oil stations of state-owned petroleum company Petroperú. In June, outbreaks of violence lead to the deaths of 15 or more local people and 11 policemen (plus one who goes missing). Pizango is given asylum in Nicaragua but eventually decides to return to Peru, where he is put on trial for the violence. Despite the government's repeal of the laws that led to the protests, deforestation of the Amazon continues.

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Home cinema

Another country: Liv Ullmann and Max Von Sydow in *The Emigrants*

LAND AND FREEDOM

Jan Troell follows his pioneering protagonists to the New World, vividly capturing the hardships and joys they find there

THE EMIGRANTS/THE NEW LAND

Jan Troell; Sweden 1971/72; Criterion UK/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 192/202 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: introduction by John Simon, 2005 making-of documentary, interviews with Jan Troell and Liv Ullmann, trailers, essay by Terrence Rafferty

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Lots of films purport to show us what the past was like. Jan Troell's magnum opus invites us to live there, so all-encompassing is its investment in the lives of its brave souls, who leave 1840s Sweden to make a fresh start in Minnesota's wide-open territory.

Around a fifth of Sweden's entire population emigrated to North America in the second half of the 19th century, and this exodus became a significant element in the national psyche. It was Vilhelm Moberg's four-novel saga *The Emigrants*, published between 1949-59, that subsequently delivered the definitive account of this migratory odyssey and was read by almost the entire nation, inevitably prompting much talk of a film adaptation.

Not, however, from the famously outspoken Moberg himself, who was having none of it, until he saw Troell's extraordinary debut feature *Here Is Your Life*, a 168-minute coming-of-age story set in the first quarter of the 20th century, drawn from the writings of Nobel laureate Eyvind Johnson. Here, obviously, was just the man for the job, and soon producer Svensk Filmindustri, known to international viewers for Ingmar Bergman's prolific output, was embarking on the most expensive project in its history.

With an expectant nation filled with anticipation, producers worrying about the budget and a revered author with ideas of his own, one can only imagine the pressure on the thirtysomething filmmaker, who after breaking down the four books into two features, *The Emigrants* and *The New Land*, set out on a year-long shoot. It helped, though, that Moberg, with his journalist's eye for credible detail, had not only created indelible characters in the central couple – pragmatic, ambitious farmer Karl-Oskar and his loving, God-fearing spouse Kristina – but had also laid out a narrative with a strong through-line from barren rural Sweden to the privations of a long sea journey and further unexpected challenges in seemingly idyllic Minnesota.

Troell then allows us to experience all of this in a manner that seems unencumbered by the familiar button-pushing mechanics of celluloid story-spinning, registering instead a direct, almost unfiltered response to the events shaping these lives – work, hardship, the land, faith, birth, self-respect, companionship and mortality. Much of this is due to his specific working methods, as he was also his own cinematographer and camera operator, trusting in his superb cast – Liv Ullmann regards this as the pinnacle of her career, Bergman notwithstanding – to find their own emotional reality in the moment, and backing himself to be there with his camera to capture it.

In an engaging interview extra on this superb Criterion UK two-disc set, Ullmann says it

was like working with a dancer, so mercurial was Troell's response to each take; and the fact that they were never sure exactly what he was shooting kept the performers alert through every scene. Whether it's the sheer toil of digging boulders out of the ground or guiding a recalcitrant ox through a windy forest path, the kinetic elation of a simple backyard swing, the whys and wherefores of building a log cabin or the sunlight falling on the couple's blond-haired young family, Troell's camera is simply alive to everything, sometimes peering over shoulders, sometimes still to reflect the power of these remote landscapes on either side of the Atlantic.

The handheld work might remind some viewers of the way the early Dogme films caused a stir merely by reminding us of the very essentials of cinema, yet with Troell there's none of the associated self-conscious theorising. He simply gets on with it – if he needs a long-held static shot he'll lock it down, and even shoot the bustle of crowd scenes with two or three cameras if required. It's a style that's undeniably spontaneous and arguably more immediately expressive than the formal modesty of an Ermanno Olmi or Ken Loach, though at the same time very much in service of the material, never aiming for the painterly effect of the exquisitely mounted tableaux of, say, Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon*.

It would be wrong, though, to suggest that Troell's method was simply to record, however sensitively, what was happening in front of him, since that would be to lose sight of the values shaping his formal choices. For a project that started production in 1969, and was released in Sweden in two parts across 1971 and 1972, its ethos is leftwards-leaning but more humanist than anything else, above all offering its characters the dignity of their own beliefs, whether reactionary or progressive. Certainly, the hierarchical oppression of the Swedish society the emigrants leave behind is revealed by the peasants having to learn by heart the seven layers of authority above them, from monarch down to local landowner.

Whether it's the sheer toil of digging or the kinetic elation of a backyard swing, Troell's camera is alive to everything

However, for a film that decries the oppression enforced by the Swedish church, it's also largely respectful towards individual faith, with Ullmann's steadfast Christianity contrasting strongly with husband Max Von Sydow's equally resilient sense of agnostic self-determination. At some distance from the sort of roles they played for Bergman, here they create one of cinema's most affecting portraits of a marriage, a union built to last because passing differences matter less than a deep, underlying friendship.

This emotional intimacy is not only a tribute to both actors' ability to inhabit the lives of 19th-century farming folk, it also highlights Troell's strengths as his own editor – ready to stay on a shot that bit longer if a performer is truly in the zone, yet prepared to cut briskly away from the most heated dramatic moments in a way that increases their momentary potency. Only Steven Soderbergh in recent years has put on such a multi-hyphenate display, though the gentle 84-year-old Troell we see interviewed in another valuable supplement remains the soul of modesty.

His films, then, must speak for themselves, and they do so here in magnificent Blu-ray transfers which at last allow audiences outside Sweden to luxuriate in their full majesty (as opposed to Warner's initial international theatrical release, which lopped out a staggering 84 minutes over the two titles). It's hard to recommend this release too highly. Those coming to it for the first time will surely feel, like the settlers on screen, the frisson of discovering a far-off and wholly captivating new landscape.

Go west: ***The New Land***

New releases

THE BLOODSTAINED BUTTERFLY

Duccio Tessari; Italy 1971; Arrow/Region A/B Blu-ray/Region 1/2 DVD; 99 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: new audio commentary, 'Murder in B-Flat Minor', new Duccio Tessari retrospective, trailers, booklet

Reviewed by Virginie Sélavy

Despite its typically ornate animal-themed title and opening murder scene, Duccio Tessari's gorgeous-looking *giallo* is an unusual take on the genre. The beautiful women, the mac-wearing killer, the stylish interiors and seductive soundtrack are all present, but the nebulous psychosexual side of *giallo* takes a back seat as the focus shifts to the police procedural and an uncommonly elaborate revenge tale.

After a young girl is murdered in the park, suspicion fall on TV sports presenter Marchi. But soon after the sensational trial exposes family secrets and hidden agendas, two more women are murdered and Marchi is released from prison. As Marchi's daughter Sarah becomes involved with tormented young pianist Giorgio, the mystery of the killer's identity deepens further.

Although *The Bloodstained Butterfly* does not have the disturbing sensuality that characterises the best-known *gialli* (Dario Argento's or Sergio Martino's, for instance), sex is a central theme, mostly in the form of illicit relationships and predatory desires, with the only innocent love story being tragically cut short.

Tessari's film is also different from those of his peers in that violence is kept to a minimum, and much attention is given to the forensic details of the investigation and the courtroom proceedings. The satisfyingly intricate plot, which culminates in an unconventional face-off, is supported by elaborate editing, skilfully used to maintain uncertainty about the killer's identity throughout. The repeated use of parallel montage also poignantly connects past and present in a manner that remains ambiguous until the very end. The soundtrack is equally refined, mixing in Tchaikovsky's Concerto No 1 with Gianni Ferrio's elegant score. Add to that the medieval atmosphere of the Bergamo locations and you have one finely wrought *giallo*.

Disc: The film is presented in a sharp new 4K restoration on Blu-ray and DVD. Extras include an audio commentary with horror luminaries Alan Jones and Kim Newman and an engaging visual essay by author Troy Howarth.

CARMEN JONES

Otto Preminger; USA 1954; BFI/Region B Blu-ray; 105 minutes; Certificate U; 2.55:1; Features: video introduction by Karen Alexander, audio commentary by Adrian Martin, Harry Belafonte NFT interview (1996), stills gallery, theatrical trailer, booklet essay by Chris Fujiwara

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Otto Preminger was determined to refashion Oscar Hammerstein II's jazzy, episodic Broadway revue into "a dramatic film with music, rather than a conventional

New releases

film musical". The result was a movie revelling in Bizet's melodrama and music (Dorothy Dandridge and Harry Belafonte, both fine singers, were disconcertingly dubbed by white opera singers Marilyn Horne and LeVern Hutcherson) while melding dusty realism and considered fantasy with élan.

Nonetheless, it's very much a white person's fantasy of an all-black world, so Adrian Martin's painstaking audio commentary usefully chews over the film's much criticised racial politics (James Baldwin said it first and best) alongside its aesthetic highs and lows.

Outside the dynamic musical numbers (Dandridge prowling through 'Dat's Love', Pearl Bailey's smoky-vocalled 'Beat Out Dat Rhythm on a Drum') the film slows to slide intimately alongside Joe and Carmen's affair, giving the whole thing an oddly uneven energy. Preminger's use of widescreen is masterly, however, and Carmen's dash for freedom along that snaking train roof positively jumps out of the screen. Dandridge, sultry and footloose early on, insolently stoical as fate closes in, gives Carmen a self-determining complexity beyond the role's femme fatale stereotype.

Karen Alexander's video introduction applauds the film's portrayal of active black female sexuality and self-expression, which may suggest a new route to critical reclamation.
Disc: A glorious transfer, in which Dandridge's tangerine skirt glows like a cigarette tip at twilight. Chris Fujiwara's authoritative essay in defence of Preminger's cinematic art and subtle social statements is a big plus, and Harry Belafonte's wide-ranging *Guardian* lecture is sheer pleasure.

CHIMES AT MIDNIGHT

Orson Welles; USA 1966; Criterion Collection/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 116 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: audio commentary featuring James Naremore, interviews with actor Keith Baxter, Welles's daughter Beatrice and Welles scholars Simon Callow and Joseph McBride, Welles's appearance on 'The Merv Griffin Show' (1965), trailer

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Orson Welles, by his own admission, never much cared for being a callow little boy. He chain-smoked cigars until his voice lowered to its signature register, and as a luminous youth in his mid-twenties he took particular relish in gearing up in the bald pate, liver spots and eye bags of an ageing Charles Foster Kane. As a Shakespeare-obsessed adolescent at the Todd Seminary for Boys in Woodstock, Illinois, he first experimented with making omnibus productions from the Bard's history plays; and he had long gravitated towards the vast figure of the bloated, bloviating old knight Falstaff, portraying him for the Mercury Theatre compilation production *Five Kings*.

By the time that Welles produced and starred in *Chimes at Midnight*, his final, definitive iteration of *The Winter of Our Discontent*, this one for the cinema, he had grown Falstaffian in true self-fulfilling-prophecy fashion. A *bon vivant* singing for his supper at the dinner tables of Europe, he was willing to make himself a figure of fun on the talk-show circuit to hustle a few shekels for his various moviemaking endeavours, none of which registered beyond the arthouse, where a few viewers happened to notice that he retained a unique mastery of his medium.

Chimes at Midnight, the most convincing argument for the essentialness of Welles's late career, is centrepieced by its brutal, flailing, mud-caked Battle of Shrewsbury, a strikingly modern piece of action filmmaking not so far from the contemporary work of Sam Peckinpah. And like Peckinpah's cinema, *Chimes* is thoroughly steeped in the bittersweet romance of failure and a stark horror at the entombing compromises demanded by adulthood – in this case, the betrayal of Welles's Falstaff by Prince Hal (Keith Baxter), who leaves behind the convivial atmosphere of the Boar's Head Tavern to surrender himself to the sepulchral world of his father Henry IV (John Gielgud).

Falstaff doesn't survive the heartbreak, though Welles lived to fight on with ragged standard held high – never a boy but never quite conceding to the deadly dignity of manhood.
Disc: I've only known *Chimes* through used-up prints and inaudible VHS bootlegs, so to have a version that is watchable – and even occasionally beautiful – is a prayer answered. (Not all of the audio issues have been overcome, but Criterion's disc is well out ahead of any other extant version.) The bevy of interviews includes a half-hour with Baxter, recounting the project's journey from stage to screen. Major.

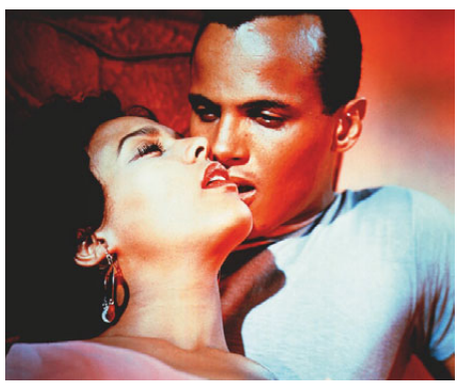
COMPULSION

Richard Fleischer; USA 1959; Signal One/Region 2 Blu-ray; 103 minutes; Certificate 12; 2.35:1; Features: 'Guardian' interviews with Fleischer, trailer, audio of Orson Welles in the film's courtroom scene

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Throughout his career, Richard Fleischer was drawn to true-crime stories – *The Girl in the Red Velvet Swing* (1955), *The Boston Strangler* (1968), *10 Rillington Place* (1971). *Compulsion* is his take on the Leopold and Loeb case, drawn from a *roman à clef* by Meyer Levin that changes names and a few details.

Top-billing Orson Welles shows up late in the day as defence lawyer Jonathan Wilk (based on Clarence Darrow) and stops the show with a mammoth speech against the death penalty for his incredibly guilty clients. It's a *tour de force* (released as a tie-in record among the extras), and Welles plays it theatrically: Wilk is being cannily manipulative and self-deprecating at the same time, more focused on a lifelong campaign against the death penalty (a theme Fleischer revisited more pointedly in *10 Rillington Place*) than in speaking up for the creepy, reprehensible defendants. However, the set piece also diverts attention from what has until then been an interesting study of the murderers – chilly, super-genius birdwatcher and Nietzsche fanatic Judd Steiner (Dean Stockwell) and jittery, smiling, too-clever-by-half Artie Straus (Bradford Dillman). Their killing of an abducted child takes place off screen, but seems to be an experiment in warped philosophy and homoerotic bonding – the *In Cold Blood*-like details of how the killer couple function and fracture are gripping. There's nice work too from Martin Milner as the classmate/junior reporter on the case and E.G. Marshall as the DA in charge of the investigation.



Love songs: ***Carmen Jones***

Fleischer was always an exciting filmmaker, and this has bursts of action and emotion, whether it's Straus cutting loose with frenzied Charleston moves in a speakeasy (it's the 1920s) or Steiner failing to complete an experiment in rape with a perplexed junior ornithologist (Diane Varsi). Twentieth Century-Fox imposed CinemaScope on all its films at the time, so Fleischer populated lecture halls and courtrooms with nervous extras, getting in close for twitching eyes and mouths (and Welles's famous false nose). Its attention to an issue is its least interesting feature, but *Compulsion* makes an intriguing counterpoint to Hitchcock's *Rope* – about the same case – in its mining of a sinister seam of moneyed America.
Disc: The added detail of Blu-ray shows off William C. Mellor's cinematography, Fleischer's dynamic framing and the cold and hot performances of Stockwell and Dillman – but also makes Welles's powdered hair and fake schnozz all the more clownish.

DEAD END DRIVE-IN

Brian Trenchard-Smith; Australia 1986; Arrow Video/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 88 minutes; Certificate 15; 2.35:1; Features: director's commentary, 'The Stuntmen', 1978 public information film 'Hospitals Don't Burn Down', trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

"Subtlety is maybe not my middle name," admits director Brian Trenchard-Smith in his commentary on *Dead End Drive-In*, a Sydney-set punkish dystopia apparently unfolding in the apocalyptic interregnum between George Miller's *Mad Max* (1979) and *Mad Max 2* (1981) and freely ripping off both of them.

Amid a widespread social and economic breakdown, drive-in cinemas are used as concentration camps for teen delinquents and other undesirables, made relatively content to stay as much by the provision of entertainment, food and drugs as by the electrified fences and armed police. The exception is protagonist Jimmy 'Crabs' (Ned Manning), whose desire to escape motors first the film's satire and eventually its stunt-heavy action.

Dead End Drive-In isn't subtle, but that is not to say that it lacks subtext. Freely adapted (by Peter Smalley) from Peter Carey's short story 'Crabs', this is an Ozploitation film that takes place in the very setting where Ozploitation films were typically screened. In this reflexive locus, as Trenchard-Smith's own previous Ozploitationers *The Man from Hong Kong*

A LIFE IN PICTURES

A fixture of fashionable post-war Paris, Nico Papatakis made his films as he lived his life: with style, passion and political commitment

NICO PAPATAKIS: THE COMPLETE FILMS

LES ABYSSES/LES PATRES DU DESORDRE/ GLORIA MUNDI (1976 & 2004 VERSIONS)/ LA PHOTO/LES EQUILIBRISTES

France/Greece 1963-2004; Gaumont/Region-free DVD; 639 minutes total; 1.66:1; Features: four documentaries on Nico Papatakis 1967-2009, interviews with Papatakis, Michel Ciment, Pierre Rissient, Francine Bergé etc, Papatakis radio interviews 1987/1991 (CD only), 'Nico Papatakis: The Eye and the Act', booklet by Manuela Papatakis

Reviewed by David Thompson

If he's known for anything, Nikos Papatakis is famous for the appropriation of his nickname 'Nico' by his one-time German girlfriend and Warhol star-to-be Christa Päffgen. But this lovingly produced, limited-edition set of his previously hard-to-find feature films – beautifully restored and subtitled in English, as are the many extras – reveals a man with a singular vision of what cinema should and could be. The handful of films he made all had an autobiographical aspect, from his unresolved status as an outsider in his adopted country of France to his passionate defence of the political, racial and social underdog. Indeed, his life was a picaresque movie in itself.

Papatakis was born in 1918 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to a Greek father and an Ethiopian mother. As a teenager, he fought in Haile Selassie's army against Mussolini's forces. Briefly educated in Lebanon (where he learned French), he moved to Greece and then flew from the dictatorship to France in 1939. In Paris, he became a fixture in the golden world of post-war Saint-Germain, rubbing shoulders with Jean-Paul Sartre and André Breton. Papatakis managed the highly fashionable La Rose Rouge nightclub, made Juliette Greco a star and launched the careers of many actors and writers in the cabaret theatre shows he staged there. He was married for a period to Anouk Aimée. Using rooms above the club (which is now the Arlequin cinema) as a studio, Papatakis produced Jean Genet's notorious *Un chant d'amour* (1950). His involvement in the Algerian cause obliged him to move to New York, where an encounter with John Cassavetes (also of Greek origin) led him to co-produce the pioneering American independent feature *Shadows* (1959).

Returning to Paris in 1962, Papatakis set about directing his own film, taking as his subject the Papin sisters, the servants who murdered their mistress in the 1930s and whose story inspired Genet's play *The Maids*. But *Les Abysses* (1963) is not, as often assumed, an adaptation of Genet; rather it draws on an entirely original screenplay by playwright Jean Vauthier. Real sisters Francine and Colette Bergé play the maids in an overtly hysterical fashion closer to the uninhibited stage spectacles of Artaud than cinematic naturalism. After the film was rejected by the Cannes film festival, Papatakis arranged a screening for his high-powered friends, resulting in glowing reviews in the press by Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir ("One of the greatest films I have ever seen"), Breton and Jacques Prévert. It worked – minister of culture André Malraux imposed the film on the festival competition, though it failed to win a prize.

Greek tragedy meets American *film noir*: *Les Pâtres du désordre*

Papatakis received more heavyweight acclaim – this time from ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, among others – for his next and arguably greatest film, variously called *Les Patres du désordre* (*The Shepherds of Disorder*) or *Thanos and Despina* (1967). In a backwards, patriarchal Greece, an illiterate peasant and his bourgeois best friend are both lined up by their elders to marry the local landowner's beautiful daughter (Olga Karlatos, who became the director's second wife). Again, Papatakis's style is both bold and stark, combining grim humour with operatic scenes of sado-masochism (Michel Ciment describes it as a meeting between Greek tragedy and American *film noir*). Intriguingly, the arduous shoot was interrupted by the military coup that occurred in 1967, an event sardonically referenced in a radio broadcast within the film.

He rubbed shoulders with Sartre, made Juliette Greco a star, and was married for a period to Anouk Aimée

Back in France, politics took the foreground in *Gloria Mundi* (1976), a provocative, self-reflexive fantasy on terrorism in which Papatakis himself voices an offscreen filmmaker compelling an actress (Karlatos) to perform in ultra-realistic torture sequences (in an interview in the booklet, Karlatos admits that she actually burned herself with a cigarette).

An intensely angry film, showing the Parisian radical chic at their most vain and cruel, it opened to threats by rightwing groups to bomb cinemas, and was withdrawn after just three days. (Papatakis re-edited the film for rerelease in 2004, removing about 20 minutes and adding new sequences making more explicit the references to the Algerian war.)

Papatakis drew more obliquely on his life for his final two films. *La Photo* (*The Photograph*, 1987) is the story of a poor Greek exile in Paris who, to keep in with a distant cousin who employs him, sustains the lie that he has a sister back home keen on marriage. It's the most restrained of Papatakis's films but it builds like a tightly coiled spring with almost unbearable tension as the illusion is about to be shattered.

Les Equilibristes (*Walking a Tightrope*, 1991) is a thinly disguised portrait of Genet (persuasively played by Michel Piccoli) and his obsession with training a young circus performer. Inspired by the director's love-hate relationship with the writer, the film's portrait of destructive egotism was not well received. Admittedly, it's an awkward film, but it revealed the director's intransigence to the end – he died in 2010, a haunted, tortured man and a unique cinematic voice.

A STING IN THE TALE

Toei had a huge hit on its hands in the 1970s with an artistically audacious series about a vengeful female assassin

FEMALE PRISONER SCORPION: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION

FEMALE PRISONER #701: SCORPION/FEMALE PRISONER SCORPION: JAILHOUSE 41/FEMALE PRISONER SCORPION: BEAST STABLE/FEMALE PRISONER SCORPION: #701'S GRUDGE SONG

Japan 1972-73; Arrow/Region A/B Blu-ray/Region 1/2 DVD; Certificate 18; 353 minutes total; 1.85:1; Features: 'Birth of an Outlaw' (archive interview with Shunya Ito), new interview with assistant director Kohira Yutaka, theatrical trailers, filmed appreciations by critics Kier-La Janisse and Kat Ellinger and filmmakers Gareth Evans and Kumakiri Kazuyoshi, Jasper Sharp on the careers of Ito Shunya and Hasebe Yasuharu, 'Designing Scorpion' (new interview with production designer Kuwana Tadayuki), new visual essay by Tom Mes on the career of Kaji Meiko, 'Finishing the Series' (archive interview with Hasebe Yasuharu), 'They Call Her Scorpion' (new visual essay on the film series by Tom Mes), booklet featuring new writing on the film by critic Chuck Stephens

Reviewed by Virginie Sélavy

Mixing exploitation with politics and formal experimentation, the *Female Prisoner Scorpion* series created a mythical female avenger who fired the imagination of 1970s Japanese audiences. It sparked numerous sequels, though none ever came close to the original three films, directed by Ito Shunya and starring Kaji Meiko. Adapted from Shinohara Toru's violent manga, this was Ito's first directorial effort, pairing him with the charismatic Kaji, who was known for the 1970 girl-gang action series *Stray Cat Rock*. After Ito left the series in 1973, Hasebe Yasuharu, who had directed Kaji in *Stray Cat Rock*, made one more episode, the last to feature the actress, whose dagger-like glare and silky black mane had by then come to define the character.

Released in 1972, *Female Prisoner Scorpion #701* shows how the naive Matsushima Nami turned into the stoical, silent assassin nicknamed Sasori ('Scorpion'). As she lies shackled on the floor of a bleak cell, a flashback reveals how she was seduced by a crooked cop who cruelly betrayed her to serve his nefarious schemes. After a failed revenge attempt, Sasori is sent to prison but, despite the abuse to which she is subjected, the authorities cannot break her spirit.

Made shortly after the failure of the student protests in Japan, *#701* is the most political of the three films directed by the left-leaning Ito. It opens as Sasori attempts to escape during an official ceremony at the prison, over which floats the Japanese flag, her action directly undermining the male authority being celebrated. It would be easy to see Sasori as a feminist heroine, but though Ito's sympathies clearly lie with her (and other female characters in the series), he is more interested in the fact that as a – by nature powerless – woman in a profoundly misogynistic society – Sasori embodies the most radical form of rebellion against the corrupt and repressive male-dominated social order.

The unexpected success of *#701* led to the creation of a series, which the Toei studio hoped to be long-running. With *Jailhouse 41*, the second in the series, Ito fully turned Sasori into a myth, a lone rebel apart from any social group, too far beyond common human strictures to enter into any kind of relationship. With no reference to the original betrayal that set her on her vengeful path, Sasori becomes the incarnation of pure individual revolt against brutal authority.

Stylistically, *Jailhouse 41* is the most deliriously inventive of all four films, and arguably the most accomplished, with the visual flourishes and theatricality already present in *#701* developed into a wildly fanciful, symbolic tale. Desolate landscapes, bloodied waterfalls and autumnal woods create the expressive background to Sasori's detached resistance to the violence and aggression that seem to characterise all human relationships.

It is to Ito's credit that with *Beast Stable*, the third film, he attempted to break the rules that he himself had established in the two earlier films. Although Sasori is initially presented as a near-demonic creature in a nightmarish cemetery sequence, Ito also attempts to humanise her. A friendship of sorts develops between her and Yuki, a tragic prostitute forced to look after her severely disabled brother's needs, including sexual. There is a more grotesque side to this film, seen in Sasori's nemesis, a flamboyantly sadistic lady gang-boss who keeps a murder of pet crows. The animal associations run through the film, suggesting a vision of humanity as irredeemably bestial, whether brutishly carnal or savagely predatory. And yet the central female friendship offers a glimmer of hope and moments of poetry, such as when Yuki drops fleetingly lit matches down dark sewers in search of the fugitive Sasori. *Beast Stable* is full of such memorable images, but it was the last film to be directed by Ito, who felt he had done everything he could with the character.

Ito fully turned Sasori into a myth... the incarnation of pure individual revolt against brutal authority

Desperate for the lucrative series to continue, Toei hired Hasebe Yasuharu to direct *#701's Grudge Song*, again with Kaji. Although both director and star make a valiant effort, it is the weakest of the four films. Much less visually adventurous than its predecessors, it is also more overtly political, with explicit reference made to the 1960s student protests. The focus switches to Teruo, a former political activist irreparably scarred after being tortured during police interrogation, which leaves Sasori relegated to a more passive role. The relationship that develops between them, the first one Sasori has had with a man since the initial film, seemed intended to further humanise her, but the effect is only to weaken the character.

Kaji went on to star as another iconic avenger in the influential *Lady Snowblood* films, while Ito turned to award-worthy social-issue films. Together they have created a durable myth, stylistically audacious and artistically ambitious, not to mention enormously entertaining. This lovingly produced release from Arrow does it justice, with a high-quality transfer, 56-page booklet and a wealth of informative supplements.

Killer instincts: Kaji Meiko as Matsushima Nami

New releases

(1975) and *Turkey Shoot* (1982) are seen playing in the background, the film poses the question of whether Ozploitation was ever a vehicle for social subversion and change, or merely an opiate of the dumbed-down masses.

This also serves as both summary and swansong for an unruly era in Australian filmmaking – for *Dead End Drive-In* was shot in Sydney's last existing drive-in shortly before its demolition, lending the title a decidedly elegiac note. The film may be looking forward to a dreary future (1995!), but Trenchard-Smith is also casting his eye back over a whole cinema movement whose days were numbered. The dated 80s aesthetic and New Wave soundtrack just add to the nostalgic vibe.

Disc: This new 2K restoration from original film materials shows off the neon lighting nicely. The best feature is Trenchard-Smith's *Hospitals Don't Burn Down* (1978), a public information film which, with its harrowing sensationalism, traumatised schoolchildren across Australia.

EARLY MURNAU: FIVE FILMS 1921-1925

SCHLOSS VOGELOD/PHANTOM/DIE FINANZEN DES GROSSHERZOGS/DER LETZTE MANN/TARTUFF

FW Murnau; Germany 1921/22/23/24/25; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray; 82/121/78/90/65 minutes; Certificate PG; 1.37:1/1.33:1; Features: commentary ('Die Finanzen des Grossherzogs') by David Kalat, essay 'The Language of Shadows' ('Schloss Vogelöd'), documentary 'Tartuffe – The Lost Film', introduction by David Cairns ('Der letzte Mann'), 'The Making of The Last Laugh', booklet

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Murnau only completed 21 features before his early death in a car accident, and of these, nine are currently believed lost. So what we have here is nearly half his surviving output, but it's enough to make one yearn for those lost movies.

Schloss Vogelöd, the earliest of the batch, received the English-language title *The Haunted Castle*, but – despite a nightmare interlude that strikingly anticipates *Nosferatu* – it's not a supernatural story but a murder mystery. The plot is conventional enough, but Murnau's inventive use of space is already evident.

Phantom, adapted from a novel by Gerhart Hauptmann, strays into Langian expressionist territory, maybe thanks to a script from Thea von Harbou, Lang's wife and regular screenwriter. Sad-eyed Alfred Abel (later to play city-boss Joh Fredersen in *Metropolis*) is the guilt-ridden clerk whose increasing dementia is reflected in the visual distortions that infect his world. At one point – anticipating Christopher Nolan's *Inception* (2010) – a whole streetful of pointy-gabled houses start to tip and teeter over menacingly as if to stab Abel's scurrying figure.

Von Harbou also scripted *Die Finanzen des Grossherzogs*, Murnau's only comedy. Set in a comic-opera Grand Duchy and shot mainly on the Dalmatian coast, it has a throwaway plot about a spendthrift grand duke who risks losing his realm to a predatory capitalist. Conspiracies, disguises, secret romance – surprisingly light-hearted stuff.

Der letzte Mann (*The Last Laugh*) established Murnau's international reputation and led to offers from Hollywood. With its famously mobile *entfesselte* (unchained) camera, huge

Funny games: *Der letzte Mann*

forced-perspective urban sets and almost total rejection of intertitles, it still looks impressive – even if Emil Jannings, as the lordly hotel doorman humiliatingly reduced to lavatory attendant, gives what now seems an overly hammy performance, conveying overwhelming emotion by acting *ver-y slow-ly*.

Jannings again in the title role of *Tartüff*, adapted from Molière's satire on religious hypocrisy. It's a film that, according to Luciano Berriatúa's documentary, Murnau never much wanted to make. The play is much truncated and saddled with a superfluous modern-day framing story, but here Jannings is effectively creepy, a lumbering black-clad bug amid the creamy baroque interiors, eyes glittering as he sucks the lifeblood out of his host Orgon's household.

Disc: All the extras from Eureka's four separate DVD releases are here, plus David Cairns's intro to *Der letzte Mann*, and the previous insert notes are assembled into a 100-page booklet. In Blu-ray for the first time, the visuals come up beautifully defined, with well-chosen toning where appropriate.

HIGHLANDER

Russell Mulcahy; USA 1986; StudioCanal/Region 2 Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 116 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: audio commentary by Mulcahy, deleted scenes, new interviews with Mulcahy and Christopher Lambert, 'making of' documentary

Reviewed by Kim Newman

In the 1980s, sheer style could count for a lot. Russell Mulcahy's near-incoherent fantasy drama launched a franchise that survived his even more cracked *Highlander II: The Quickening* to spin off into TV shows and a straggle of direct-to-DVD sequels, with a remake or reboot almost inevitable. The follow-ups – made in violation of the original's explicit "There can be only one" tagline – have clouded the issues of a screenplay (by Gregory Widen, Peter Bellwood and Larry Ferguson) that is either half-baked or seriously overcooked.

In contemporary New York, broody immortal Connor MacLeod (Christopher Lambert) clashes with other long-lived random individuals who have been brought together by an irresistible urge to chop each other's heads off until the survivor attains more mystic powers. Flashbacks show Connor's origins in picturesque Scotland, where he trains under ancient mentor Ramirez (Sean Connery), and where his longstanding grudge against warrior-psycho the Kurgan (Clancy Brown) begins.

The film's New York is full of caricature aggressive cops and bystanders – everyone snarls and preens like the glam wrestlers of the supremely silly opening – while the flashbacks toss och-aye clichés like cabers through Scotch mists. Meanwhile the script takes clumsy routes to confirm what has already been shown, as Roxanne Hart's heroine, who combines being an NYPD forensic tech with expertise in ancient sword manufacture, delves into the stratagems Connor has used to disguise his immortality.

It's all wildly inconsistent, casually skipping over plot issues to get to the next cool set piece, overacted up to 11 by Connery (vainly pretending not to be Scottish) and Brown (licking a priest and singing along to 'New York, New York') and stuck with a horrible score by Queen... But it's still astonishingly entertaining. Mulcahy does particularly imaginative transitions between past and present, and his operatic fight scenes have influenced generations of fantasy-action-superhero movies.

Disc: A 4K restoration certainly showcases the film's imaginative visuals, even if it also draws attention to some dated optical effects. This is the European theatrical version/director's cut of the film, which includes some scenes – including a WWII flashback – trimmed in the original US release.

PATHS OF GLORY

Stanley Kubrick; USA 1957; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray; 88 minutes; Certificate PG; 1.66:1; Features: commentary, multiple critical overviews, trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

If Kubrick's first fully professional film *The Killing* demonstrated his technical mastery beyond any doubt, *Paths of Glory* constituted his first serious bid for heavyweight critical standing, a target he overshot so substantially that even those averse to his later, more ponderously overthought films usually concede he hit the bullseye here.

Despite the WWI setting, Kubrick spends comparatively little time on the battlefield – though the early, near-suicidal traversing of no man's land still represents a high-water mark in cinema's attempts to convey the physical and psychological horrors of mechanised warfare.

Instead, the film anticipates the likes of *Dr. Strangelove* (in the bleakly cynical view of the military command's moral bankruptcy) and *The Shining* (in the labyrinthine exploration of various spaces, be they the serpentine trenches or the pointlessly ornate and cavernous palace in which the generals have made themselves comfortable) in the way that it traps Kirk Douglas's honourable Colonel Dax in an impossibly Machiavellian situation – which is not remotely of his own devising but which he is powerless to escape, having to watch his understandably traumatised men become pawns in a ruthless game of chess both on and off the battlefield.

The coda, a haunting café song performed by Kubrick's future wife Christiane, may have been added at a late stage after studio concerns were expressed about the film's lack of any female presence elsewhere, but it feels both wholly apposite and necessarily cathartic.

Television

THE ONE GAME

Mike Vardy; UK 1988; Central/Network/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 207 minutes; 1.33:1

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

It's the old, old story: wealthy businessman gets suckered into playing all-encompassing game in which he risks losing everything and along the way confronts unpleasant truths about himself. This version is distinguished by conscious Arthurian overtones – images of a woman's hand rising from a lake, a joust on motorbikes (shades of George A. Romero's 1981 *Knightriders*), women based on Guinevere and Morgan le Fay – and the acting: a young Stephen Dillane (here billed as 'Stephen Dillon') oozing charisma as the victim/Arthur figure;Nicholas Thorn, impetuous, charming head of games company Sorceror (*sic*); and Patrick Malahide, unleashing his inner ham as his former partner/Merlin surrogate, magically reappearing to take revenge after years in a secure psychiatric ward.

At times something odd and profound seems to loom through the muddle of rather half-baked puzzles and raggedly plotted backstory – a current of real anxiety, and a concern with the way stories and symbols are woven into our lives that made me think of (I feel like a fool for saying this) Italo Calvino. Whether that makes up for the multiple implausibilities and the vaseline-swabbed lenses that signal dream sequences and flashbacks is a matter of taste. Nigel Hess's Clannad-style music (lyrics in, depending on which source you believe, Patagonian Welsh or deliberate gibberish) is unhelpful.

Disc: NB: this does not come with the detailed booklet that accompanied an earlier release. Otherwise, adequate.

THE OUT-LAWS

Belgium 2012; VTM/Arrow/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 512 minutes; 16:9

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

"Dark Belgian comedy" says the billing, which feels like it ought to be a joke ("I like my comedy like I like my chocolate..."?). But Flemish cinema has been attracting attention and admiration for a few years now, so why not Flemish television?

The series opens with a funeral: Jean-Claude, a middle-aged Flemish bourgeois, has died, leaving a grieving widow. But she is, it turns out, about the only person who is grieving: as bumbling local life-insurance men start investigating and the narrative unfolds backwards, Jean-Claude – known to members of his extended family as 'The Prick' ('De Kloot', literally 'the bollock') – emerges first as a vindictive, self-righteous racist and misogynist, later as a blackmailer and a rapist. Who didn't have a motive for murdering him?

The 'outlaws' of the English title are the Prick's wife's four devoted sisters (it would have made more sense to stick to the original title, *Clan*), determined to rescue her from his malign influence. The themes of family tension and loyalty are universal, but there is something specifically Belgian about the stifling conventionality tinged with kitsch – for me, it brought back memories of the more uncomfortable aspects of an adolescence in suburban Brussels. Tension isn't always well maintained – well, we already know the outcome – and the kookiness can seem self-conscious, but at times (as when the Prick is trolling his possibly paedophile best friend in an online chatroom) the level of tastelessness is quite impressive.

Disc: The high-quality sound and picture you'd expect of a modern TV production.

The Water Margin Forty years on, I'm surprised at how much of its spirit survives, how touching its emphasis on chivalry and decency is

THE WATER MARGIN

Japan 1973-74; NTV/Fabulous Films/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 1180 minutes; 1.33:1

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

Cults are necessarily mysterious phenomena; in the case of television programmes from the pre-digital era, the mystery often lies in the entanglement of quality and the dearth of alternative forms of entertainment. More plainly: did we watch *The Water Margin* because it was good or because there wasn't anything else on?

Two series of this period fantasy were made by Nippon TV in the early 70s; the BBC broadcast it a few years later in slots that wandered maddeningly across the schedules. The set-up was explained each week by Burt Kwouk in voiceover, along with the supposedly ancient advice that you should not despise the snake for having no horns, "for who is to say it will not become a dragon?" (come on, this is basic biology). In the China of the Song dynasty 1,000 years ago, 108 heroes – reincarnations of earlier heroes – faced by corrupt and oppressive rulers, became outlaws, retreating to the water margin of Liang Shan Po.

The 14th-century source novel contains numbers of interwoven stories about individual warriors; this version concentrates on the career of Lin Chung (Nakamura Atsuo), an imperial guard framed and exiled by the sheriff of Nottingham figure Kao Chiu (Sato Kei). Lin Chung is a reluctant outlaw, his allegiance to justice at odds with his fanatical loyalty to the imperial throne – the rival claims of morality and authority are a running theme. The stories revolve around young women being rescued from arranged marriages or forced seductions, treasure being stolen from corrupt officials to distribute to the people, heroes meeting at cross-purposes, often in disguise, and fighting until the misunderstandings are resolved and identities established, with much paying of compliments.

Stylistically, the drama owes something to *wuxia*, but swordplay, camerawork and acting are feeble next to anything by King Hu around the same period. The dubbed English version features some excellent actors, including Miriam Margolyes and David Collings; but David Weir, the scriptwriter, reputedly worked from a synopsis rather than a translated script, and slippage between what is happening on screen and what is being said can be painful. The more overtly supernatural comic drama *Monkey*, made by the same team a couple of years later, survived the process of translation better.

But looking at *The Water Margin* 40 years on, I'm surprised at how much of its spirit survives, how touching its emphasis on chivalry and decency is; and it must be credited with introducing the spirit and conventions of *wuxia* – even in a debased form – to British audiences, so that later we were better placed to appreciate *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *The Assassin*.

Disc: I'm not convinced that Blu-ray's superior resolution is being put to good use, given the deficiencies in the original sound and picture. It is a shame there are no extras – there is an awful lot of context to explore, and several of the English-speaking cast are still around to offer their perspective. S

New releases

Disc: A substantial upgrade from the old DVD in both technical quality and contextual apparatus. The extras complement each other very well, offering a production history (Peter Kramer), an analysis of the overall visual approach (Richard Combs), a comparison with Kubrick's other films (Richard Ayoade, refreshingly alert to the film's often overlooked sense of humour) and an expectedly thorough full-length critical commentary by Eureka regular Adrian Martin.

PSYCHOMANIA

Don Sharp; UK 1972; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 90 minutes; Certificate 15; 1.66:1; Features: short film ('Roger Wonders Why'), documentaries ('Return of the Living Dead', 'Hell for Leather', 'Discovering Britain with John Betjeman'), interviews (Harvey Andrews, John Cameron, Nicky Henson), restoration demonstration, trivia subtitles, trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Psychomania is set in that never-never world peculiar to British cinema in which dissolute twentysomething 'teenagers' (led by the long-haired, permanently sneering Nicky Henson) enunciate nihilistic defiance in flawless RP, while demonstratively moustached constables exclaim "What the blazes!". But it is also clearly made in the post-*Night of the Living Dead* era, with set, costume and coiffure design repeatedly emphasising the production year in a way that will both thrill and distract 70s nostalgists. It has been a much requested title ever since the BFI launched its Flipside cult-movie strand seven years ago, and it's all too easy to see why.

Although galumphingly terrible by any objective critical yardstick, it's irresistibly entertaining from first frame to last, stirring in zombie bikers, low-impact vandalism, George Sanders (in his last film) as a sinister family retainer (the adjective applying to both him and the family), garish interior design that *Yes Minister*'s Sir Humphrey Appleby might describe as 'courageous', a gratuitous hippie-tinged guitar-strumming interlude, hauntingly fog-shrouded dreams around the stones of Avebury in Wiltshire, and lots of satanic frog imagery (*sic*), this last ultimately underpinning a supernatural climax that is at least refreshingly different.

Hammer horror veteran Don Sharp handles everything with customary brio, even though he's clearly (and understandably) more energised by the numerous high-speed bike and car chases and some impressive stuntwork (elaborate suicides being a key plot device) than by the more stilted dialogue-driven scenes. That said, assorted troupers, including Beryl Reid, Bill Pertwee and lots of instantly recognisable British film faces (if not necessarily names), give it their impeccably professional all.

Disc: Once thought unrestorable thanks to the loss of the original negative, the discovery of black-and-white separation elements has allowed the film to scrub up remarkably well in high definition, with only the occasional colour fluctuation betraying its age. An absolutely stacked package even by Flipside standards offers everything an obsessive *Psychomania* fan could possibly want, down to the seemingly incongruous but nonetheless firmly on-topic

Hell on wheels: Nicky Henson in *Psychomania*

sight of John Betjeman touring Avebury, a delightful subtitled 'trivia track' by the Wilson Brothers that combines affectionate mockery of the film's many incidental shortcomings with clearly genuine love for the 90-minute whole (something equally true of Vic Pratt's breathlessly enthusiastic booklet essay) and a hatchet-burying 2016 interview with a jovial Nicky Henson, who seems to have finally come to terms with *Psychomania* being a significant (if famously unwanted) career milestone.

ROAD HOUSE

Jean Negulesco; USA 1948; Kino Lorber/Region 1/A Blu-ray; 95 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: audio commentary by film historians Kim Morgan and Eddie Muller, featurette 'Killer Instinct: Richard Widmark and Ida Lupino at Twentieth Century Fox', trailer gallery

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Rich kid Jefferson 'Jefty' Robbins is the big fish in a small town on the US side of the Canadian border, and though his best pal Pete Morgan (Cornel Wilde) has an unflagging trust of Jefty going back to when they were kids together, you can tell this guy's at least part-shark – first, because he has the busted sobriquet Jefty, and second, because he's played by Richard Widmark, carrying over his unhinged Tommy Udo giggle from the previous year's *Kiss of Death*.

Pete keeps the books for Jefty's combination bowling alley and rustic-chic cabaret, frequented by hard-drinking he-man lumberjacks, while Jefty takes care of shaking the cocktails and chasing the skirts, and everything's copacetic until the new lounge singer shows up – a dark-eyed girl who's been around every block in Chicago and has now lugged a portmanteau of skimpy tops up to the piney north, her first dolorous performance at the piano prompting gum-snapping counter girl Celeste Holm to quip, "She does more without a voice than anybody I've ever heard."

That's Ms Ida Lupino tickling the ivories, singing in her own inimitable, bourbon-marinated and shall we say limited register, and gelding every man who tries to talk down to her or feel her up – though in due time she falls for strong, silent, human-cigar-store-Indian Wilde. Friendly competition for this mysterious stranger's favour turns to swimming-hole frolics, nightclub brawls, false accusations and titillating bowling lessons, the whole kit and caboodle given a hard-edged sheen by DP Joseph LaShelle, whose particular skill set suited him very well indeed to *film noir* – a style with which director Jean Negulesco isn't particularly associated, though he more than acquits himself. Almost obscenely enjoyable, and a nice Exhibit A in any argument for The Genius of the System.

Disc: Fun to hear Holm, who died in 2012, raving over Lupino's figure in a bathing suit in the attached featurette. Game recognises game.

WHOEVER SLEW AUNTIE ROO?

Curtis Harrington; USA 1972; Kino Lorber/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 91 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: audio commentary by David Del Valle and Nathaniel Bell, trailers

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The obvious antecedent for Curtis Harrington's *Whoever Slew Auntie Roo?*, starring Shelley Winters in the title role as an American ex-soubrette who forcibly takes in a pair of brother and sister orphans while presiding over an eyesore English estate, is Robert Aldrich's *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962), which had proved the box-office viability of attaching a middle-aged female star with a pedigree stretching back to the studio system to a psychological horror plot.

In fact, Harrington revisited this formula time and again, with Simone Signoret (*Games*, 1967), Winters and Debbie Reynolds (*What's the Matter with Helen?*, 1971) and Ruth Roman (*The Killing Kind*, 1973), though his take on the old-dark-house genre went back at least as far as *The Old Dark House* – the 1932 James Whale film, that is, which Harrington himself had helped to rescue from neglect in the Universal vaults.

Talking about *Auntie Roo* in his posthumously published autobiography *Nice Guys Don't Work in Hollywood*, Harrington freely slates the original script by Jimmy Sangster and the cameraman imposed on him by American International Pictures, Desmond Dickinson, and it's hard to disagree with him on the latter point – the film begs for gothic filigree but gets hard, flat lighting instead. While not in the first rank of Harrington's features, *Auntie Roo* has much to recommend it: a typically shameless Winters; Ralph Richardson as a tousled mountebank psychic with a nose for brandy; and an insidious inversion of 'psycho-biddy' tropes, which leaves the slightly dotty but ultimately well-meaning Auntie Roo the victim of the mercenary moppets she's taken in, finally consumed by what the boy declares, smiling, to be "a bloody good fire".

The house, 'Forest Grange', is perhaps the real star here, a ramble of secret passageways, dumb waiters and gingerbread Victorian ornament – another of the film's numerous references to the Hansel and Gretel story, though just as pertinent is Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, the subject of the first and last movies that Harrington ever made, when aged 16 and 74.

None of this either adds to or distracts from the pure camp pleasure of watching Winters nosh a red apple in a smushed close-up.

Disc: Kino has done well with this textured transfer from what appear to have been excellent source materials, and also by eschewing the American release title *Who Slew Auntie Roo?*, which Harrington long and loudly bemoaned.

Lost and found

RAPHAEL, OR THE DEBAUCHED ONE

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

Seldom has existential despair seemed so stylish: this forgotten film from not-quite New Waver Michel Deville deserves revisiting

Reviewed by Dan Callahan

Though he was making fresh and tender films devoted to beautiful women (and men) in the 1960s, Michel Deville was rarely grouped with the other young directors of the French New Wave, perhaps because he seemed to be working in a more straightforward commercial style. Nina Companeez was his regular screenwriter in this period; their exquisite *Benjamin* (1968) got a release outside France and memorably celebrated the luscious looks of the young Catherine Deneuve and Pierre Clémenti. Better yet was *The Bear and the Doll* (1970), an outright screwball comedy in which Brigitte Bardot battled Jean-Pierre Cassel in a way that came very close to the spirit of Howard Hawks.

The collaboration of Deville and Companeez culminated in their masterpiece, *Raphael, or The Debauched One* (1971), a very neglected romantic tragedy that centres on the shifting relationship between Maurice Ronet as the cynical Raphael of the title and Françoise Fabian as the religious young widow who beguiles him. Ronet was best known for his two films with Louis Malle, *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* (*Lift to the Scaffold*, 1958) and especially *Le feu follet* (*The Fire Within*, 1963), in which he played a used-up and suicidal man. Fabian had just played the lead in Eric Rohmer's *Ma nuit chez Maud* (*My Night at Maud's*, 1969), and so these players bring those associations with them to Deville's film.

Raphael is heightened at strategic moments by music from the operas of Bellini, and this music functions as the emotional grandeur that the two main characters are so gravely pursuing. Fabian's Aurore is first seen gazing out of her window, her face vibrating with sensual expectation until she puts on her boots (in fetishistic close-up) and goes out with her female entourage to frolic on the last day of summer. There is a sense right from the start of this movie that life and love and beauty are coming to a climax or a close, fading away like the sun at magic hour at the end of a day.

The ladies are set upon by masked men on horseback, one of whom is the dissipated Raphael, who stays up all night drinking and whoring. A libertine always in need of sleep and deathly afraid of being bored, Raphael tells a girl who is in love with him that he can no longer desire a woman once he has bedded her. All the enticing elements of life are shot through here with both imminent loss and dissatisfaction, and it is only when the death-obsessed Raphael meets the complex, haughty Aurore that he starts to secretly feel that he might have found his saviour and his match.

The libertine: Maurice Ronet as Raphael, with Françoise Fabian as Aurore

All the enticing elements of life are shot through here with both imminent loss and dissatisfaction

Raphael stumbles drunkenly into church one morning where the pious yet teasing Aurore is praying, and when he jokingly tries to pray with her she responds with warm laughter. They connect with each other, but there are so many social and gender and personal barriers between them that it soon feels as if they are desperately signalling each other from behind separate prison bars. "I like the air to bite my skin a little," Aurore tells Raphael as the cold weather comes. When people are at the end of their rope, as these two are, they need cold air to revive them, or someone to slap them in the face.

Raphael, or The Debauched One gathers power steadily until a climactic moment in the street, where Bellini's music comes crashing in and Raphael kisses Aurore and leaves blood on her neck from a wound on his hand. She debauches herself in order to try to come down to his level, but it's no use, and the ending of the film plays like a bad joke made by a man so self-loathing that he can't do anything seriously. If *The Bear and the Doll* riffed on the style of Howard Hawks, then *Raphael, or The Debauched One* is done in the manner of Max Ophuls, and Deville and Companeez manage to reach that elevated level here.

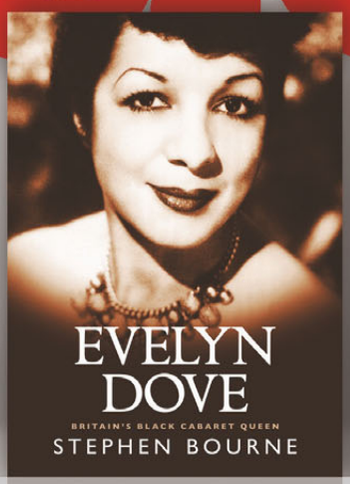
This was the last film that Companeez wrote for Deville, who never quite seemed the same director after he stopped working with her as his scenarist. She went on to direct films of her own and to write for others, and died in 2015. Deville is still with us, though he hasn't made a movie since 2005. *Benjamin*, *The Bear and the Doll* and *Raphael, or The Debauched One* are a rich trio of films that repay re-viewings. In the case of *Raphael*, seldom has existential despair been expressed in such a seemingly light, glancing, erotic style, and that is a testament to the skill and depth of insight that Companeez and Deville were capable of at their best. S

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID

'Close to both the Hollywood model of drama and the British convention of period movie, but with an unusual psychological sophistication, wit, and willingness to go that extra mile. Perhaps because it's a joint work by a man and a woman, perhaps because of the period it was made, when sexual politics were in an uproar, *Raphael, or The Debauched One* is an uncommonly sophisticated movie, untrammeled by conventional notions of what makes a character sympathetic.'

David Cairns 'Mubi', September 2010

Read



HALLOWEEN

By Murray Leeder, Auteur, 112pp, paperback, illustrated, £9.99, ISBN 9781906733797

"Well researched, engagingly written and informative, it is destined to become an invaluable resource for horror scholars and fans alike." Richard Nowell, author of *Blood Money* (2011)

John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) enjoys a status as October's equivalent to *It's a Wonderful Life*, most often thought of as the originator of the slasher film. Murray Leeder offers a bold and provocative study of this paradigm of low-budget ingenuity that struck a chord with audiences. It explores *Halloween* as an unexpected ghost film, and examines such subjects as its construction of the teenager, and the relationship of *Halloween* the film to Halloween the holiday, and Michael Myers's brand of pure evil. It is a fascinating read for scholars and fans alike.

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BLACK STAR

A BFI Compendium

Edited by James Bell, BFI, 160pp, paperback, illustrated, £18.99, ISBN 9781844579716

From Hollywood to Nollywood, from British cinema to American television, and from much-loved comedies to the most moving dramas, black stars have lit up our screens and inspired our imaginations.

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www.bfi.org.uk/black-star

EVELYN DOVE

Britain's Black Cabaret Queen

By Stephen Bourne, Jacaranda Books Art Music, 160pp, paperback, illustrated, £12.99, ISBN 9781909762350

Bygone pioneer Evelyn Dove was the first black British celebrity to make an impression in the world of entertainment, as a star of revue, variety, cabaret and television. Refusing to be constrained by her race or middle-class West African and English backgrounds, her exceptional career would span five decades, from the 1920s to the 1960s, and open doors in America and across the globe.

This celebration of her work includes more than 40 unpublished photographs from her private collection. The acclaimed historian and author Stephen Bourne is also a contributor to the BFI's Black Star compendium.

A must-have volume for those interested in jazz and the icons of the age, black history or the history of the BBC, and for academic and cultural institutions.

www.jacarandabooksartmusic.co.uk

I'M BUFFY AND YOU'RE HISTORY

Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Contemporary Feminism

Patricia Pender; I.B. Tauris: Investigating Cult TV Series; 256pp; hardback, £59, ISBN 9781780767451; paperback, £16.99, ISBN 9781780767468

Buffy the Vampire Slayer gave TV viewers an exhilarating alternative to the cliché of a hapless, attractive blonde woman victimised by a murderous male villain. With its strong, capable heroine and witty dialogue, the show became one of the most widely analysed texts in contemporary popular culture. Thirteen years after the last episode, *Buffy* is still an internet and media presence, studied internationally.

Here, Patricia Pender explores the Slayer's postmodern politics, her position as a third wave feminist icon, and her fandom and legacy in popular culture. This is a fresh and challenging contribution to the growing literature on the pleasures of a great cult TV show.

www.ibtauris.com

BACK TO THE FUTURE

LA JETEE

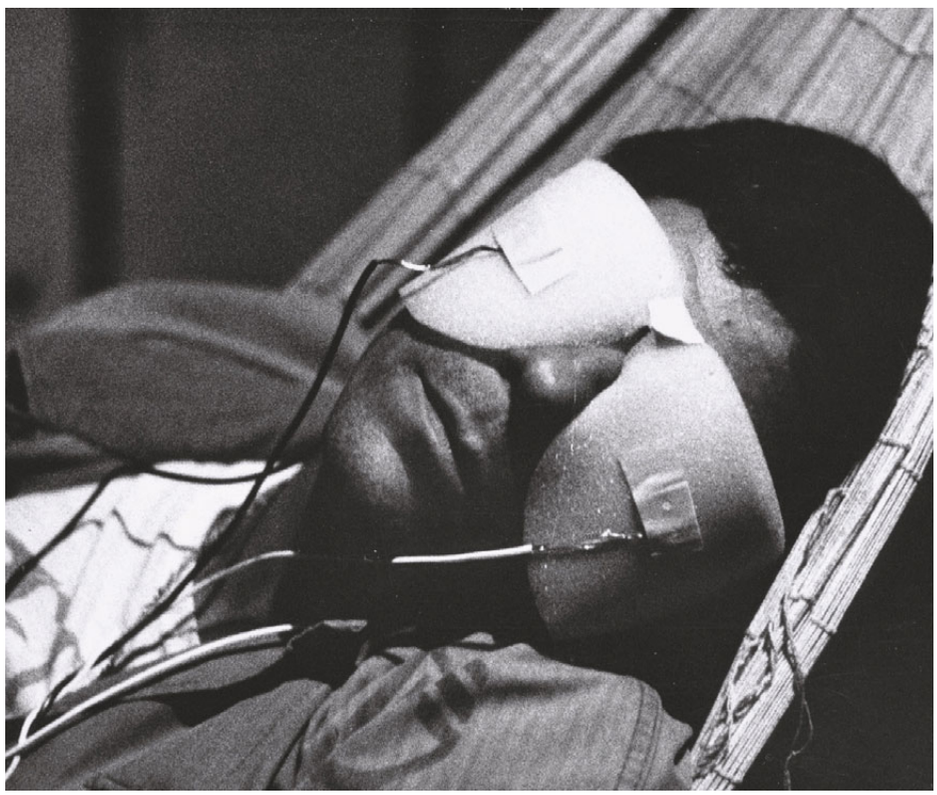
By Chris Darke, BFI Classics, BFI/Palgrave, 96pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781844576425

Reviewed by Brian Dillon

Regular readers of this magazine may recall that in its 2012 poll of the 'Greatest Films of all Time', Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) finally shouldered *Citizen Kane* (1941) off the summit. Both films have much to do with fixation, memory and the futility of looking back, and it seemed for a moment as if their musical-chairs act at the head of the poll was being directed by an interloper at number 50, Chris Marker, a great advocate of the Hitchcock film who once wrote a memorably idiosyncratic reading of it. Marker's *La Jetée* (1962) may well be the most influential film of our time: a strangely static, 20-minute sliver of sci-fi (of a sort) that seems to swallow up swathes of film history. As Chris Darke puts it in his svelte but well-stocked study of the film, *La Jetée* is no mere cult artefact or seminar-room specimen, but "a classic fully fledged and with no need of qualification".

It is also a remarkably hard film to write well about, in part because its narrative and form can appear so exquisitely self-enclosed. The story is circular: it begins and ends with a death on the observation pier at Orly airport, Paris. A time-traveller, who glimpsed this event as a boy, returns from a post-apocalyptic future, falls in love with a woman who calls him "her ghost", is then pitched into a more distant future and finally back again to the jetty in peacetime, where he is shot – the childhood memory had always been of his own death. This Borgesian parable is rendered almost entirely in still images, brought alive beneath the rostrum camera – apart, that is, from a single moment when the sleeping woman opens her eyes. Film critics and other admirers of *La Jetée* have often struggled to avoid simply marvelling at the poetic economy of the work, admiring its repertoire of entrancing images – faces, birds, children, ruins – and dutifully noting the debts it owes to Hitchcock, to Proust, to the degraded genre of the *photo-roman*.

Darke, who has long been the most assiduous anglophone scholar of Marker's work, condenses a remarkable amount of research into his scant 90 pages. From the Royal Belgian Film Archive he has unearthed Marker's exercise-book editing plan and an alternative cut of the film in which not one but two scenes actually move. (This version was screened in the 2014 Marker exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, London.) He has traced some of the imagery in *La Jetée* to 8mm footage Marker shot in Berlin in 1947 for his first film, *The End of the World as Seen by the Angel Gabriel*. And Darke provides as thorough an account as can be given right now of the film's conception and production alongside *Le Joli Mai* (1963), a portrait of Paris at the end of the Algerian War. Among the oddities Darke has gleaned is the fact that the film was derided on its release by, of all people, the budding-conservative English novelist Kingsley Amis ("a piece of avant-garde kitsch... like having your leg broken before running a mile").



Timebends: Davos Hanich in Chris Marker's deeply influential sci-fi masterwork *La Jetée*

The more substantial insights here concern links between *La Jetée* and Marker's pursuits in artforms other than film – though one has the sense he thought of it all as film of a kind. His 1950 novel *Le Coeur net* – translated the following year as *The Forthright Spirit* – is an obvious source for some of the imagery and ideas in *La Jetée*: the aftermath of war, the persistence of memory against the impersonality of machines and a visionary state that hovers between life and death. (Darke points to affinities between *La Jetée* and Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* in 1950, but Marker's novel makes me wonder if he hadn't also seen Powell and Pressburger's 1946 classic *A Matter of Life and Death*, with its downed airman fretfully trapped between this world and the next.) Though it sounds reductive at first, Darke is surely right to conclude of Marker: "It was precisely his skill as a literary stylist that distinguished his approach to cinema."

When questioned, Marker liked to say that 'La Jetée' had been made by somebody else, and so he had nothing to say on the subject

When questioned about *La Jetée* later in his life, Marker liked to remark that it had been made by somebody else, and so he had nothing else to say on the subject. His allergy to acclaim was such that when the film's producer Anatole Dauman spoke about Marker on television, the director wrote to him: "Every homage is a disguised act of aggression." But no account of *La Jetée* can be complete without considering the 'Marker effect' by which the film has gone to work on other directors and, especially, visual artists. Darke, who was one of the curators of the Whitechapel show, notes that the film stands up well to being shown on a loop, as a gallery installation – but that goes only a little way towards acknowledging Marker's influence on such diverse figures as Jem Cohen, Tacita Dean and the Otolith Group.

Darke is a dogged pursuer of pertinent facts about *La Jetée* and its context, and he is especially to be admired for having researched and written this book while the contents of Marker's archive and studio – he died in 2012 – are still being catalogued and assessed. If Darke's approach feels at times a touch constrained in its cultural and conceptual reach, there's a good deal to be said for halting the time-traveller for a while and asking where and when he came from.

THE FASHION OF FILM

How Cinema Has Inspired Fashion

By Amber Butchart, Mitchell Beazley Publishers, £30, 224pp, ISBN 9781784721763

FASHION IN FILM

By Christopher Laverty, Laurence King Publishing, £30, 224pp, ISBN 9781780678733

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

It's a distinction that can easily be lost in discussions of screen style, but fashion and costume are very different things. Two new books tackle the fertile territory where the wardrobe department meets the catwalk. Amber Butchart's lavishly illustrated and tirelessly researched *The Fashion of Film* investigates the influence of film costume on fashion, from home sewing patterns inspired by D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* in 1916 to, say, Miuccia Prada's various interpretations of the *Belle de Jour* look. Tracing the impact of individual films one by one, Butchart's book is an engrossing, intelligent study of the cultural waves made by cinema. Alongside its historical sweep, her book is studded with intriguing titbits such as the fact that shoe designer Christian Louboutin was moved to take up the trapeze after seeing *Wings of Desire* (1987), or that *The Hunger* (1983) inspired Alexander McQueen to design a transparent plastic *memento mori* corset, in which live worms squirmed across his model's flesh.

Christopher Laverty's *Fashion in Film*, equally generous with gorgeous photographs from films and runways, offers chatty critiques of the contributions made by individual fashion designers to a variety of films. En route, he debunks a few myths about individual film-fashion moments, explains how the meanings of garments change when inserted into movie narratives, outlines the power of brand placement and the contortions that designs undergo when co-opted for a movie character. High-end designers are rarely drafted in to create complete wardrobes; their contribution is limited either to the gowns or suits worn by the leading players or a handful of show-stopping set-piece outfits. So this volume necessarily dwells more on excess and luxury than other costume-design books. There is space here to linger on Audrey Hepburn's Ascot dress for *My Fair Lady* (1964), designed by Cecil Beaton and chosen by Laverty as "the most ornately glamorous costume in cinema history"; Hermès handbags, too prohibitively expensive a prop even for many a Hollywood production; and a sharp sequence of suits by Armani, a brand that has been boosted by film, ever since *American Gigolo* (1980).

Luxury brands use the cinema screen as a shop window for their aspirational goods, and Laverty discusses several fashionista flicks, such as *The Devil Wears Prada (2006)*, *Bride Wars* (2009) and the *Sex and the City* movies (2008-10), which fetishise designer brands as part of their plot mechanics. On the other hand, Hollywood has long sought ways to capitalise on its glamorous product. The Hollywood Pattern Company was founded in 1932 and in the same decade a chain of Cinema Fashion Shops opened to sell lines approved by studios, to avoid fans buying department store copies. Wider trends can burst from film costume design too. Butchart cites Adolph Zukor cheekily claiming that *Morocco* (1930), featuring Marlene Dietrich in white tie and tails, had caused a run on women's slacks. Both books discuss *Letty Lynton* (1932), in which the leading lady wears gowns by Adrian with extravagantly ruffled shoulders. Butchart mentions how British *Vogue* helped to popularise the look, writing that "we have been flooded with little Joan Crawfords", and the wide-shoulder silhouette was born, remaining a fashion staple for many years.

Costume films can inspire unlikely trends, at least within high-end fashion. Butchart writes that the release of *Marie Antoinette* films in both 1938 and 2006 were marked with spreads in *Vogue*, selling the luxe 18th-century look to latterday ladies with expensive tastes. Conversely, as Laverty explains, the delayed release of Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* (2013) meant that by the time the film was out, the "fashion audience, despite months of being drip-fed hype about the clothes, was ready to move on", with the new flapper look two seasons out of date.

In 'Letty Lynton', Joan Crawford wears gowns with extravagantly ruffled shoulders – and British 'Vogue' helped popularise the look

As Butchart writes, fashion anachronisms can make historical film looks more palatable for consumers. Julie Christie's contemporary hairstyles in *Doctor Zhivago* (1965) helped make the fur and leather ensembles in that film instant fashion hits. Designer fashion too must be adjusted to fit the film rather than the other way around. Laverty explains that Coco Chanel supplied four versions of one dress for *Palmy Days* (1931) – so it would look its best from all angles. Rita Hayworth's devastating strapless gown in *Gilda* (1946) was supported by distinctly unglamorous corsetry as she had recently given birth. And the black Givenchy number Audrey Hepburn wears in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) was radically made over by costume designer Edith Head.

Designer Bernard Newman, who worked both for films and for Bergdorf Goodman, illustrates one key difference between fashion and costume. He could let fly with gorilla fur and black latex on screen, exotic materials that would never appear in his department store ranges, even on garments styled after those he sketched for Ginger Rogers and Irene Dunne. It's similar to the difference between the extreme catwalk looks and the styles that filter down to the high street. No one ever wore McQueen's worm corset to Tesco, but the scarlet-lined, cinch-waisted grey jacket that accompanied it is a covetable, and copiable, garment. Butchart's book opens with a quote from Elsa Schiaparelli that nails the theory, although elides the time and effort involved: "What Hollywood designs today you will be wearing tomorrow."

Glamour girl: Joan Crawford in *Letty Lynton* (1932)

SEPARATE CINEMA

THE FIRST 100 YEARS OF BLACK POSTER ART

JOHN DUKE KISCH

FOREWORD BY HENRY LOUIS GATES JR. AFTERWORD BY SPIKE LEE

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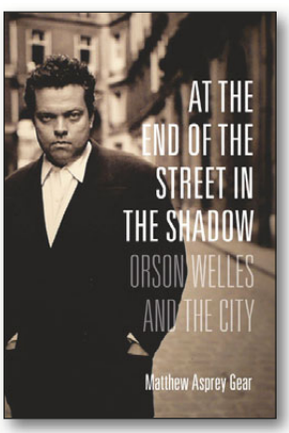

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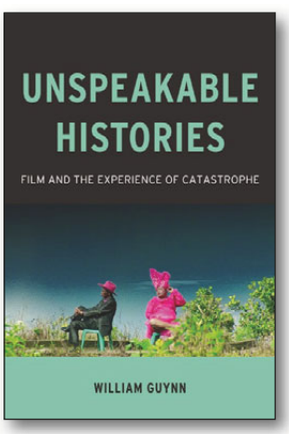

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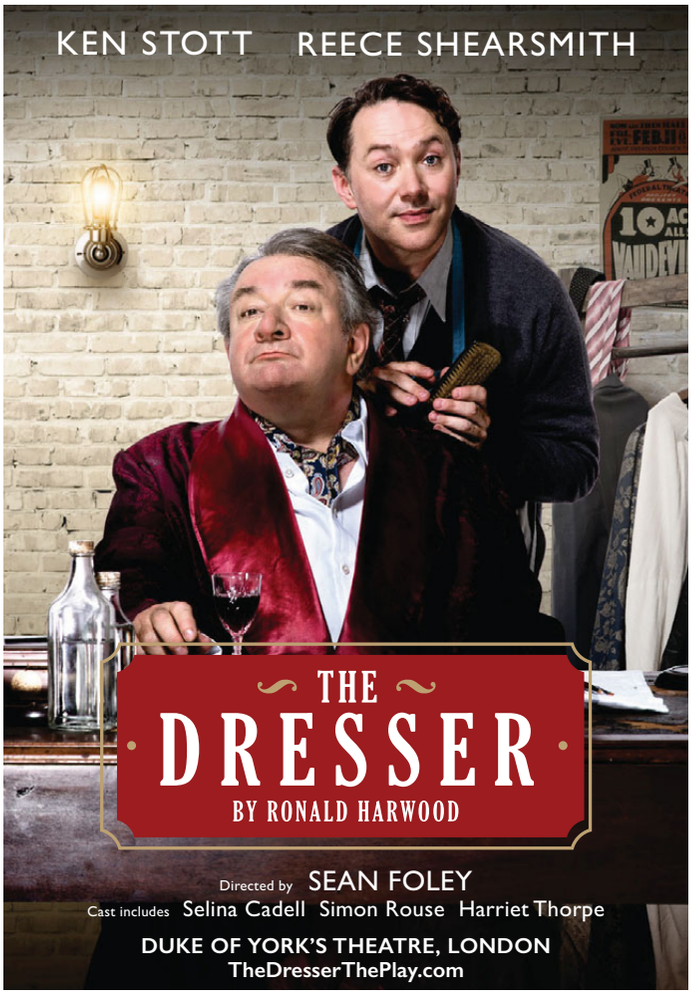
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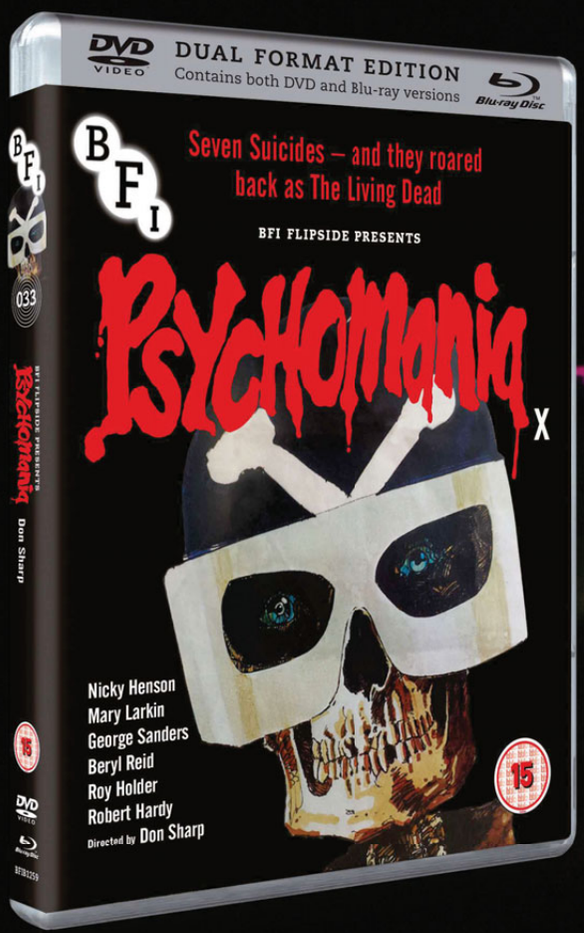

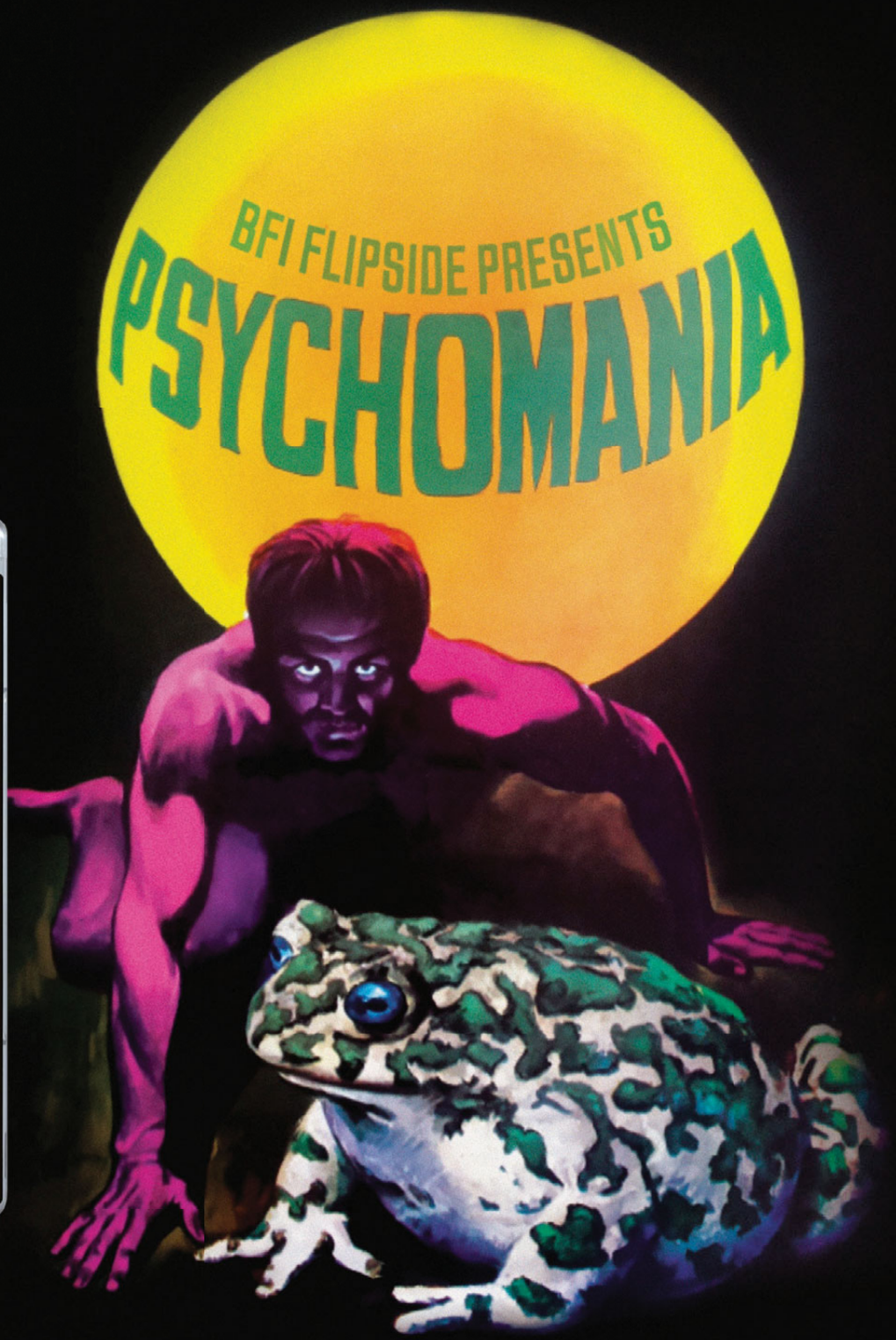

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MOS DEFINITELY

For decades, I have been regaling my film students with the (apparently apocryphal) story of how the acronym MOS came about. I had been told, on ostensibly good authority, that MOS was originated when director Fritz Lang came to Hollywood in the 1930s. The tale went that when Lang was asked whether synchronised sound was to be recorded for a take, he would often reply, "Nein, *mit out* sound." An abbreviated jumble of his German and English phraseology became the industry acronym, or so the legend goes.

Now I read in Sam Davies's article on dubbing in post-war Italian cinema ('Misread my lips', Wide Angle, *S&S*, October) that the 'MO' really means 'motor only' – at least in Italy. Although Davies's account may be more accurate, I will continue to use the '*mit out* sound' version. As famously said in John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend."

Frank P. Tomasulo *Visiting professor of film and screen studies, Pace University, New York*

HOLLOW CLAIMS

A curious, two-fold error creeps into Robert Hanks's DVD review ('The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses', Home Cinema, *S&S*, October). He states, "The moment in *Henry VI Part Three* when a father discovers that the battlefield corpse he is stripping is that of his son is here reversed, so that the son realises the body is his father." This is wrong on two counts.

First, the scene in Shakespeare's text (Act II, scene v) has both a son search a body for crowns only to discover that it is his father, and then a father search a body for gold only to discover that it is his son. The symmetry is important. Second, this exact structure is reproduced in *The Hollow Crown*. Some cross-cutting between their speeches is introduced and three-quarters of the text is excised but the dual nature of the original scene is retained.

It is a powerful scene and, contrasting with what John Barton described as the plays' "mess of angry and undifferentiated barons, thrashing about in a mass of diffuse narrative", it usefully gives a 'common man's view' of events.

On that score, the Jack Cade rebellion plot both parallels (and mocks) the familial dynastic infighting and shows the disorder and turmoil it creates. *The Hollow Crown* removes this in its entirety and Hanks is right to regret that significant loss.

David Lane *London*

DISPLACEMENT ACTIVITY

I gladly offer my support to your plea for the DVD release of *Give Us This Day* (Lost and Found, *S&S*, October). I saw the film in 1949 and have long sought an opportunity to re-view it. There are, however, some misleading elements in Fintan McDonagh's survey of the film and its place in the career of Edward Dmytryk. He first came to the UK in 1946 for *So Well Remembered*, based on the novel by James Hilton. This was a co-production between RKO and the Rank Organisation. As the senior contract director at RKO, Dmytryk was the automatic choice for the project. Shooting took place in Macclesfield and at Denham Studios with Freddie Young as director of photography. The negative was then taken to California for completion, with Harry W. Gerstad as editor; the score was composed by Hanns Eisler. Dmytryk, the producer Adrian Scott and scriptwriter John Paxton then set to work adapting Richard Brooks's novel *The Brick Foxhole* for the screen.

The resulting film, *Crossfire*, was nominated for five Oscars. Shortly after it opened, Dmytryk and Scott were subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee. They had made their last film for RKO. As McDonagh records, salvation for Dmytryk came in the form of the American Rod Geiger and Englishman Nat Bronston. For them Dmytryk directed first, in 1948, *Obsession* starring Robert Newton and then, the following year, Geiger's cherished project, the Pietro di Donato novel *Christ in Concrete*, which became *Give Us This Day*. Both were released by the Rank Organisation, so the earlier contacts must have been helpful.

There is no indication in Dmytryk's autobiography that he made any effort to remain in the UK beyond the expiry date on his visa. He managed to complete post-production on the second of these two films before returning to America; not long afterwards he began his prison sentence for refusing to name names.

Timothy Gee *By email*

CANON FODDER

Nick James was generous in his summary of the BBC's '100 Greatest Films of the 21st Century' (Editorial, *S&S*, October), which reads like a canonical list of pre-agreed tasteful arthouse hits. Exhibiting a real terror of innovation, it shows that the homogeneity of critics is every bit as limiting as the consensual choice of, say, architects. Singling out titles is pointless, but my list would start with *Victoria*, *Tangerine*, *Birdman*, *White God* and *Hannah Arendt*. And *Inside Out* over *Frozen*, really?

Christopher Fowler *London*

Additions and corrections

October p.68 *The Beatles Eight Days a Week The Touring Years*, Certificate 12A, 137m 43s; p.72 *The Clan*, Certificate 15, 108m 22s; p.74 *The Fencer*, Certificate PG, 98m 39s; p.75 *Free State of Jones*, Certificate 15, 139m 49s; p.78 *The Greasy Strangler*, Certificate 18, 93m 22s; p.81 *Kubo and the Two Strings*, Certificate PG, 102m 4s, some screenings presented in 3D; p.82 *League of Gods*, Certificate 12A, 109m 23s; p.84 *Little Men*, Certificate PG, 85m 19s; p.90 *Supersonic*, Certificate 15, 121m 58s; p.62 *Swiss Army Man*, Certificate 15, 97m 25s; p.92 *Under the Shadow*, Certificate 15, 83m 59s

LETTER OF THE MONTH
THE PERILS OF PAMELA

I really enjoyed Kim Newman's 'Green Penguin' cinema article about British thrillers and horror of the 60s and especially the 70s ('Green unpleasant land', Wide Angle, *S&S*, August).

The mention of *Our Mother's House* (1967, above) reminded me of the excellent early work of Pamela Franklin, who seemed to grow up in those crumbling mansions and large off-kilter homes Newman refers to. Franklin's gentle but somewhat unfathomable look served well the sense of unease at play in those buildings. You could definitely add *The Legend of Hell House* (1973) to the roster of spooked houses Newman talks about, especially in the context of 'The House That Jack Built', the episode he cites from *The Avengers*.

Things didn't get any better for Franklin when she did manage to leave home to take a cycling holiday in rural France in the underrated thriller *And Soon the Darkness* (1970). Of course, the killer in that film turned out to be not the mysterious foreigner played by Sandor Elès, but the very British-looking bobby played by John Nettleton to whom she turns for help. Hardly surprising, given that the writers and producer were all involved in *The Avengers*.

John Davies Heidelberg

ENDINGS...

TO LIVE AND DIE IN LA

The eerie final moments of William Friedkin's tale of Secret Service agents on the tail of a counterfeiter offer a brutal vision of hell on earth

By Ian Mantgani

In 1939, Ronald Reagan starred in a series of law enforcement dramas as Agent Brass Bancroft, including *Code of the Secret Service* and *Smashing the Money Ring*, in which he busted counterfeiting rackets. In the Production Code era, such patriotic procedurals showed Warner Bros complying with respectability after years of catching heat for glamorising vice in gangster chronicles. By 1985, when *To Live and Die in LA* came out, Ronald Reagan was president, Reaganomics was pinching inner cities, and the rebel filmmakers of New Hollywood were scrambling for independent production opportunities after the decline of their 70s heyday: America still wanted to believe in myth, but reality was permissive and chaotic enough for a more disillusioned version of the Secret Service picture to bubble up.

To Live and Die in LA follows two Secret Service agents – the reckless Richard Chance (William Petersen) and his by-the-book new partner John Vukovich (John Pankow) – on the trail of counterfeiter Eric Masters (Willem Dafoe), in a film that continued director William Friedkin's exploration of the thin line between renegade cops and their criminal antagonists. But while the heroes of *The French Connection* (1971) and *Cruising* (1980) hurtled towards danger, *To Live and Die in LA* went further by killing its leading man, Chance, with a shotgun blast to the face after a bungled showdown with Masters. It's unusual for an investigative action flick to sacrifice its hero, though not unprecedented – *T-Men* (1947) is another case where one of the cop partners is murdered by fraudsters in a climactic shootout. Here, Chance's demise is not the endpoint; rather, it's the pivot to Friedkin's surreal, free-associative encore of septic values floating amid the smog.

Chance, a base-jumping adrenaline junkie, is shot after a series of careening escapades, including a car chase the wrong way down the Terminal Island Freeway after he's been responsible for the death of another undercover federal agent. "Don't do this to me!" Vukovich shouts as his partner dies, recognising that he now has to face things alone. He tracks Masters to his printing press, shooting him in the midst of a blazing inferno.

The morning after, Masters's unfazed crew divvy up their assets ("Just business..."), while Vukovich visits Chance's informant Ruth (Darlanne Fluegel). Chance had been blackmailing her for information and sex by threatening to revoke her parole and when Vukovich arrives, Ruth is packing her bags, believing she is now free. Instead, Vukovich, growing steely, informs her, "You're working for me now." The laser synth blast that opens Wang Chung's 'Wait' slashes through the soundtrack, turning to dissonant piano as the scene cuts to Ruth's shock, then to flashbacks of Chance perching alone against Ruth's venetian blinds, and of the pair having sex. Another ominous synth drone accompanies the cut back to Ruth, almost smirking, accepting her fate, and another flashback to Chance's station wagon, parking in the wasteland by Ruth's house. The song kicks in and the credits roll on these unsettling notes – Ruth trapped in a cycle of exploitation, and a spectral transference of Chance's corrupt spirit on to the personality of Vukovich.

It's a film that continued William Friedkin's exploration of the thin line between renegade cops and their criminal antagonists

The film's financiers, SLM, were astonished by the death and cynicism, and begged Friedkin to shoot another ending. In the alternative version, Chance survives, but his pencil-pushing boss takes credit for the Masters bust and gets promoted to Washington, while Chance and Vukovich are consigned to a field office on an Alaskan hilltop. Chance flashes back to a California beach girl, chuckling to himself in defeat. It's an ah-shucks ending, or, as Petersen called it, "The Eddie Murphy ending."

The picture wasn't a hit, but if the softer ending had been used, it would likely have been derided and forgotten. Throughout *To Live and Die in LA* there's an incongruous tension between the use of buddy-cop clichés, implausible scenarios and hyperstylised 80s plasticity on the one hand, and the nagging sense of a deliberate existential examination of these excesses on the other. In the alternative ending that's dissipated; in the eerie, downbeat actual ending it's made manifest.

As the credits play, and Wang Chung sing that "street corners seem designed to lie in wait", the sun sets and the camera looks out of a car window, speeding past Wilmington power plants, over Vincent Thomas Bridge and ending up out in the desert. A final synth thud settles on a ghostly scare – a post-credits reprise of Chance at the venetian blinds. The condemned spirit wanders, in a rhythmic beat that would be echoed by the credits sequence of Alan Parker's *Angel Heart* two years later, when Mickey Rourke descended the elevator to meet Satan. In the scorched desolation of LA, Friedkin had already found hell on earth.

A new 4k restoration of *To Live and Die in LA* is available on DVD and Blu-ray from Arrow Video from 21 November

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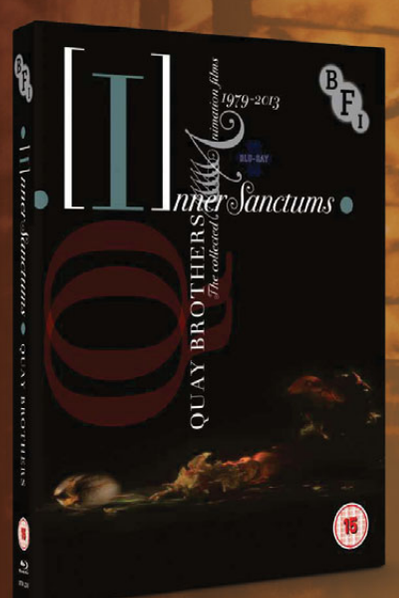

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